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27 September 2019

Mrs Sharon Betts  
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Wimborne  
Cutlers Place  
Colehill  
Wimborne  
Dorset  
BH21 2HN

Dear Mrs Betts

**Special measures monitoring inspection of St Catherine's Primary School, Wimborne**

Following my visit to your school on 17 to 18 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2019.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. However, it now requires more detailed consideration to address the identified weaknesses found during this inspection.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services

for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2019

- Improving the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - securing an effective safeguarding culture
  - ensuring that leaders' checks on teaching are robust and that teachers act upon leaders' advice
  - making sure that governance provides robust challenge to leaders, in particular so that they can be confident that the expenditure of additional funding makes a difference to pupils' academic, physical and emotional development
  - ensuring that middle leaders receive the training and support they need to improve teachers' subject knowledge
  - improving the provision for disadvantaged pupils, lower attaining pupils and pupils with SEND, so that these pupils make good progress
  - ensuring that curriculum requirements are met, so that pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain
  - developing a curriculum fit for purpose so that teachers develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding sufficiently in the subjects they study, including English and mathematics
  - articulating high expectations and supporting teachers in making accurate assessments.
- Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make good progress, by ensuring that:
  - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - teachers make good use of what they know pupils can do and understand to plan work that meets pupils' needs
  - teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Improve the quality of pupils' personal development and welfare urgently by ensuring that:
  - safeguarding arrangements minimise the risk of harm to pupils and support the most vulnerable pupils, so that they can achieve well
  - teaching motivates and interests pupils, so that pupils consistently apply their best effort to their learning.
- Improve the early years provision so that children make good progress by ensuring that:
  - the quality of the provision and teaching approaches used across Nursery and Reception classes are suitably strong
  - staff receive training and guidance, so that adult interaction with children is effective

in supporting children's emotional and language development

- teaching in the early years is consistently good, and assessment is accurate across both the Nursery and Reception classes
- teachers plan purposeful activities that carefully build on and extend what children can do, know and understand.

An external review of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 September 2019**

### **Evidence**

The inspector undertook lesson visits to all classes and year groups, including the Nursery. The inspector scrutinised documents and met with pupils, staff and parents. The inspector also held discussions with trust leaders, including the chief executive officer, members of the interim academy board (IAB) and two education support managers from the trust. The inspector also spoke to pupils to find out what they know and can do. The inspection also focused on safeguarding practice. A wide range of documents, including those relating to vetting and appointing staff, as well as how staff work with other agencies to keep pupils safe, were scrutinised.

The inspector also focused on pupils' early reading development and the effectiveness of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) teaching in the school. This involved speaking with subject leaders, and observing phonics teaching and pupils in Years 1 and 2 reading to their class teachers.

### **Context**

There have been many changes to staff and governance following the previous inspection. The school has a newly appointed headteacher and interim deputy, both of whom took up their posts in September 2019. Prior to this, the trust's former director of education and standards took temporary charge, following the resignation of the previous headteacher. The previous deputy left at the end of the summer term 2019. Leaders have appointed new teachers. These include teachers of Year 1 and Year 4 as well as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Other key changes include the disbandment of the governing body. This has been replaced by an IAB to oversee the immediate work of the school with delegated responsibilities from the trust's board. Leaders have also changed the structure and organisation of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) unit. The pre-school leader has been appointed to work alongside the EYFS leader to establish a new vision, with greater continuity and communication within this phase.

### **The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection**

New senior leaders are providing clear and pertinent guidance for staff. Teachers and teaching assistants are responding positively to this. Staff are willing and determined to improve. Leaders have made clear their expectations of staff by introducing what they refer to as 'non-negotiables'. These expectations are helping to establish clear approaches to promoting effective learning. They also contribute towards establishing an environment that allows pupils to settle and learn.

However, the quality of education is weak. Weaknesses in the curriculum design still prevent pupils from acquiring sufficient knowledge in a range of subjects. This is reflected, for example, in pupils' poor vocabulary. By the time they leave the school, too many pupils who are disadvantaged or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) falter with reading or spelling common words.

Leaders have not ensured that the school has an effective phonics programme in place. Teachers do not have the knowledge of when and how pupils learn their letters and sounds. This leads to low ambition, such as pupils in Year 1 being retaught simple words, for example 'jar' and 'jet'. Teachers do not have a clear understanding of phonics development or assessment. As a result, phonics teaching is haphazard. Pupils' reading books do not match their phonic ability and the reading scheme is not coherent enough to secure pupils' phonic development.

Teachers do not consider pupils' prior learning or knowledge well enough when planning lessons. This means pupils are sometimes given work that is either too easy or, at other times, too difficult. These inconsistencies mean pupils do not acquire the knowledge and skills they need. Teaching does not ensure that the necessary knowledge has been secured to enable pupils to make progress.

Leaders are keen to ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn and develop outside lessons. The range of clubs ensures that pupils can pursue individual interests and enjoy alternative experiences, including art and sport. Pupils mix well. They are polite and considerate when moving around the school, and at breaktimes. Pupils show a good understanding of the school's values. They speak confidently about themes of forgiveness and courage which have been the focus of the school's collective worship. Pupils are keen to demonstrate these values. For example, they raise money for charities and share thoughts and feelings through their prayer buddies.

Pupils say they are now much happier. Staff, including meal-time assistants and those who work with pupils during the school day, told me that pupils are consistently polite and caring. Pupils show positive attitudes towards others and promote a strong sense of inclusion and tolerance. This includes fostering a respect for equality, including for those with SEND.

New senior leaders have taken effective action to change the routines and expectations at the start of the school day. They now insist on a smooth, safe and 'slick' start. This ensures that pupils enter school punctually and begin learning promptly, with a sense of purpose. This has been widely welcomed by pupils, staff and parents alike. Leaders also now insist on attention to other details, for example standards of uniform. This helps to maintain a level of respect and pride around the school. These expectations help to create a positive ethos and are beneficial to the pupils.

However, when teachers plan lessons that do not meet the pupils' needs pupils often become distracted. They sometimes talk over each other, fail to listen attentively, or simply opt out. When this occurs, pupils do not learn as well as they ought to and can disrupt one another. This is most evident in key stage 1.

In addition, leaders do not have strong or well-established routines for checking pupils' attendance, particularly those with persistently high absence. This often affects the most vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. The headteacher is now taking action to remedy this. However, systemic weaknesses in checking attendance and having early discussions with parents means that some pupils are not in school as often as they should be.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school**

Since the previous inspection, the school has gone through significant turbulence and change, particularly to staffing arrangements. Trust leaders recognised the need for urgent action and are beginning to raise standards, although there is much left to do in some areas, such as the quality of education. The right steps are being taken in order to revitalise staff, bring a common sense of purpose, and begin remedying some of the main weaknesses in the school. The new headteacher and deputy have settled quickly. They have already started building effective relationships to earn the respect of pupils, staff and parents. Their actions are securing trust and confidence in the leadership and having a galvanising effect. Staff morale has improved markedly. One teacher summed up the feelings of many when they said, 'Smiles (for pupils and adults) that have been missing for too long are back!' Leaders listen to staff so that teachers and others feel valued and are involved in determining the future of the school. The headteacher and deputy are mindful of teachers' workload and ensure this is given due attention to preserve their well-being.

Leaders, including those through the IAB and trust, have worked effectively to address weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements found at the previous inspection. The school has robust procedures for vetting and appointing staff, in line with government expectations. Safeguarding training for staff is consistent and well communicated. As a result, staff know how to respond to pupils who have concerns. The designated safeguarding leaders take swift action when necessary and work with other agencies to keep pupils safe. Pupils say they feel safe and looked after. They know what to do to stay safe in different situations, including when online and in the event of a school evacuation. Pupils agree that bullying and any use of derogatory language are rare. They told me that staff deal quickly with these should they occur. However, some risk assessments, such as for trips and visits, are not yet written in good time to make reasonable adjustments where these may be necessary.

Despite these improvements, there are still too many weaknesses in the quality of education. These hold pupils back. Some leaders do not have a clear enough vision

for improvement. Middle leaders' subject knowledge, particularly of phonics and early reading, is poor. This means that they are unable to offer the necessary challenge and support to teachers in the classroom. As a result, some poor practice in teaching is continuing. However, in mathematics the deputy headteacher has introduced a clear framework for teaching number and calculation. This is now being implemented consistently across the school. Pupils and staff say that they recognise the benefits of this approach. It is providing a model of progression to enable pupils to build their knowledge and any pupils who are starting to fall behind to catch up.

Professional development and training are having variable impact. The best example can be seen in the reinvigoration and restructure of the EYFS unit. Here, the organisation and management are enabling the children to have a more 'joined-up' experience across the unit. Staff interact well with the children. Children talk and play purposefully, developing their language and taking the opportunities to consolidate learning, such as their knowledge of shapes. However, as with other parts of the school, leaders in the Reception Year do not have a strong enough understanding of phonics. There is not a robust phonics programme and assessment of the children is weak. This means pupils are not getting off to a strong start in their early development of phonics for reading and writing. Leaders' confused approach to phonics also lacks ambition so that children, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, do not catch up quickly if they are behind.

Following recommendations from the previous inspection, leaders have started to review their curriculum, including what is being taught and how this will be rolled out. This has taken into account all subjects and programmes of study of the national curriculum and has led to some improvement. For example, each topic now has a related high-quality text to provide deeper insight and meaning through literature. However, leaders and teachers are not thinking deeply enough about the steps in learning that children need to take to accrue secure knowledge over time. This leaves pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, with gaps in their knowledge and reduces their readiness for the next stage in their learning.

The IAB has worked effectively to provide challenge and support to school leaders. However, the most recent summary self-evaluation is far too generous. This risks unnecessary complacency which the school cannot afford. Trust and IAB members have not assured themselves of the accuracy of judgements. Overall, though, the IAB has a clear understanding of what must be done to improve. They are keen to get this right for the pupils.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The new headteacher and deputy have quickly understood the overarching areas for improvement.



- Leaders are establishing a culture of mutual trust so that staff feel supported but also challenged to improve.

**Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- There are significant weaknesses in the quality and effectiveness of middle leadership, including in relation to pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.

**External support**

The trust is providing support for school leaders. This internal support has had a positive impact to bring the school to its current position. The trust has plans to extend this further, including ongoing professional development and training is to be provided, for example to develop phonics. The trust board will keep the IAB in place. The school has not received any significant external support.