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Miss Becky Costello
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Dear Miss Costello

Special measures monitoring inspection of Blewbury Endowed Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11–12 September, 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. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Oxford, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that the safeguarding of pupils is effective by:
 - completing all checks on appointments and recording on the single central record
 - regularly checking that the single central record is up to date and compliant with statutory requirements
 - making sure that child protection files contain chronologies detailing the dates of all meetings attended and that minutes of meetings are filed
 - reporting incidents and concerns to the local authority in a timely fashion in keeping with the school's safeguarding policy
 - undertaking an external safeguarding audit
 - dealing promptly with any health and safety concerns, such as the making safe of electrical sockets
 - reviewing site security
 - improving the supervision of pupils on the playground and around the school
 - providing staff with appropriate safeguarding training following appointment.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management, including in the early years, by making sure that:
 - effective leadership and governance structures are established
 - middle leaders develop the skills and expertise needed to oversee their subjects and secure improvements
 - the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils more precisely
 - staff performance is regularly monitored and reviewed so that staff are held firmly to account
 - policies to support the development of pupils' acceptable and safe behaviour throughout the school are known, understood and applied consistently so that low-level disruption decreases and behaviour improves
 - the use of additional funding is kept under watchful review and evaluated for value for money and effectiveness
 - the school website meets requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including in early years, so that all pupils, and particularly the most able and disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teaching and support staff receive timely and focused training to carry out their roles effectively
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve

- the teaching of reading ensures that pupils in all year groups improve their reading so that, as a minimum, they reach age-related expectations
- communication between teachers and teaching assistants improves so that pupils, and particularly those with SEND, are provided with effective support
- teachers use accurate assessment information effectively to plan tasks that meet the needs of pupils.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11–12 September

Evidence

Together with the interim headteacher, I made short visits to every classroom to look at pupils' learning and their behaviour. Together, we also met with a small group of pupils to review and discuss their work across a range of subjects. In addition, I had discussions with groups of pupils in a pre-arranged meeting, in lessons and around the school. I held meetings with the interim headteacher, leaders and non-teaching staff. I also met with the chair and a governor from the interim executive board (IEB).

I reviewed a range of documents, including safeguarding records, policies, improvement plans and the school's new curriculum. I also scrutinised records of pupils' behaviour and attendance. I reviewed records of meetings of the IEB and the visits from local authority advisers and the diocese. I held conversations with representatives from the local authority and the Diocese of Oxford. I spoke to several parents at the beginning of the day and considered the views represented in five emails received from parents.

Context

Significant changes have been made to the leadership of the school. Following the section 5 inspection in March, the previous headteacher left the school. The governing body was quickly replaced by the IEB. In addition, the previous assistant headteacher, who had some part-time headteacher responsibilities, was appointed as full-time interim headteacher in the summer term. There has been a decline in the number of pupils attending the school, so new leaders have reorganised it into five mixed-age classes. A new teacher joined the school from the beginning of September and the school is fully staffed.

The Department for Education, senior leaders and the local authority have begun the detailed process of the school joining a multi-academy trust, but no firm decisions have been made yet.

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

Following the previous inspection, there was a comprehensive review of safeguarding. Leaders wasted no time in addressing the shortcomings in safeguarding systems identified. Decisive and swift action was taken to improve checks on staff, record keeping and filing systems and to make appropriate modifications to the buildings and grounds. There is an effective ongoing programme of support from the local authority and the IEB to oversee and embed these improvements. Systems are now in place to ensure more prompt reporting of concerns with outside agencies, such as social services, where necessary. Parents told me that they particularly value the new and more secure entry and exit

arrangements to school. Pupils told me that they feel safe and well looked after in school.

Staff have had appropriate training to be more confident in safeguarding matters. As a result, most staff understand the school's policy and follow procedures well, ensuring a more caring culture. New systems and practices have been introduced to improve the security on site. However, more consistently vigilant adult supervision is needed, particularly at lunchtimes, to ensure that all areas of the school are adequately monitored.

Senior leaders worked tirelessly over the summer to develop outline planning for a broader and richer curriculum for all pupils. As a result, the quality of education is showing early signs of improvement. This new curriculum has been rewritten to be more clearly focused on the school's vision to promote compassion and independent thinking. Termly class projects have been planned to provide clear links to pupils' personal, social and health education opportunities, as well as a range of enrichment activities. The leaders' new curriculum had only just started to be introduced, but already its initial focus on art has clearly motivated and engaged pupils. Pupils in key stage 2 spoke articulately, having gained knowledge and interest about the work of the artists that their classes are now named after.

New long-term curriculum maps provide staff with a clearer overview of the range of content to be covered each term across most subjects. Subject leadership has been reorganised and staff are embracing the changes. Senior leaders and the IEB are aware that curriculum planning is in its very early stages. They know these plans require refinement to ensure that all subjects are well sequenced across the year groups. Further support is needed to ensure that teachers can use these resources to plan learning that is suitably challenging and meets the needs of all pupils. In addition, visits to lessons identify that there are significant differences in the way staff approach the teaching of phonics and early reading skills across the school. Clearer leadership and further training for staff are needed tackle this.

Senior leaders have developed outline plans for more targeted spending of additional funding this year. More information is supplied to teachers and work has started to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the effective additional support they need to make rapid progress. An external review of the pupil premium is due to take place later this term. Leaders have recently developed improved policies and plans to support disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local authority has begun working with the school to support improvements in the leadership and provision for pupils with SEND. This work is in its early stages and has not yet had a chance to make a difference.

New policies and systems have been introduced that have improved pupils' behaviour significantly. Pupils are smart and polite, and most conduct themselves well. Pupils and parents told me that they recognise that behaviour is better than it was, bullying is rare, and that they feel that staff care for the children well. There have been changes to the systems to supervise break- and lunchtime, which are

beginning to improve behaviour. Despite this tightening up on rules, some low-level disruption remains in a minority of classes. This is particularly the case when learning activities are not sufficiently well suited to meet pupils' needs.

Although overall attendance figures are in line with national figures, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND have not improved and remain too low. Although they monitor the attendance of individuals, leaders are not routinely monitoring the attendance of these groups. Consequently, leaders are not aware of the impact of their strategies for improving attendance.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher and new governors have acted decisively. They rapidly developed and introduced new systems and procedures and can demonstrate a clear trail of improvements. The school's action planning defines clear strategies to support continued improvements and is ambitious. Staff morale is much improved, there are now much clearer lines of accountability, and leaders are more considerate of staff workload. There is a shared sense of purpose and drive to improve standards.

The interim headteacher is well supported by her leadership team and the new IEB. Together, they have made a positive start in tackling weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. They are determined to create an ambitious and inclusive culture within the school.

The IEB and senior leaders have produced a comprehensive improvement plan that systematically addresses the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. There are clear timescales and success criteria to measure the full impact of leaders' work.

Leaders and governors have quickly nurtured much more positive relationships with staff and are realistic about the pressures on staff in terms of workload. Teachers and support staff were keen to tell me how much they feel the culture of the school has improved. They now feel well supported and accountable, and they appreciate the support for their well-being. Staff are fully committed to the vision of the school and staff morale has been transformed. Teachers are receiving subject-specific support from the local authority for English and mathematics. This is helping to develop teachers' subject knowledge and build their confidence.

New monitoring systems and target setting are being introduced to enable leaders to hold staff to account more effectively. Senior leaders and governors recognise that the skills of some subject leaders need to be developed further.

The experienced team of governors within the IEB want the best for the school. They understand their roles and fulfil their statutory duties, for example in relation to safeguarding. Governors know the school well and use their wide range of skills, knowledge and experience to offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders.

Their clearer and more regular communication with parents and the local community has been particularly valued.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders, together with the IEB, are committed to improving standards across the school. Leaders are increasingly strategic in their thinking and better at focusing on the right areas. Safeguarding systems are much more robust and improvements to the quality of education have begun. Parental confidence in the school is growing.
- The experienced and dedicated governors of the IEB provide very effective support and challenge to leaders. They communicate well and work in close partnership with the local authority and diocese. Governors check the school's progress regularly and expect significant improvement, but at a pace staff can manage.
- Leaders have wisely redeployed staff and restructured the school effectively. New performance management systems set clear targets for staff and hold them accountable for improvements in their work. Leaders have also improved communication both within the school and with the local community. Parents and staff are keen to praise how well the interim headteacher has improved working relationships within the school.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Refinements are needed to the new systems to ensure consistently high-quality supervision of the site, particularly at lunchtime.
- Many subject leaders are new to their roles this year. Training is required to ensure that they have the knowledge and expertise to plan learning in their subjects so that it happens in the right order, and to quality assure provision across the school.
- Clearer leadership of phonics and reading is needed. Staff training is required to improve the consistency of approach in developing pupils' reading skills and fostering a love of reading throughout the school.
- Leaders' current work with the local authority to improve provision for pupils with SEND needs to be given priority to ensure that it makes an impact in every classroom.
- More thorough monitoring of attendance is needed. This will enable leaders to evaluate the impact of the school's work to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

External support

The experienced chair and governors of the IEB are dedicated and committed to the school. They have worked hard to support and challenge leaders and ensure that standards have quickly begun to improve.

Sensibly, governors have made very good use of local authority school improvement consultants and representatives from the diocese. Governors ensure that external support provides suitable training and support for leaders without overwhelming them. This expert external support from external consultants and advisers has underpinned the progress made by the school. The local authority, diocese and IEB have a shared vision and commitment to continuing improvements to safeguarding and the quality of education this year.