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Mr Gareth Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Thomas

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marden Vale Primary School

Following my visit with Matthew Cottrell, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19–20 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2018. 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 school's action plan is fit for purpose. However, at the point of the inspection, it did not include precise timely milestones for improvement.

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 Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2018

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - the trust board and governors hold leaders to account for outcomes and standards in the school more robustly
 - safeguarding processes are effective in minimising risk to pupils
 - improvements are planned precisely so that actions taken are highly effective
 - all staff have suitably high expectations of pupils' conduct and their progress
 - the curriculum is broad and balanced so that pupils can achieve well and have a greater understanding of a range of issues relating to their personal development
 - the leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is sufficiently rigorous and strategies are implemented effectively to support strong pupil progress
 - relationships with parents are strengthened to restore trust in the work of the school
 - middle leaders are suitably skilled so that they can support the drive for rapid improvement
 - trust directors and governors fully evaluate the impact that additional funding is having on improving the outcomes and personal development of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - making sure that teaching staff and adults who support pupils in lessons have the subject knowledge and behaviour management skills that they need
 - using assessment information to plan work that matches the learning needs of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils
 - challenging the most able pupils to reach the highest standards
 - identifying pupils' knowledge and understanding accurately so that gaps in learning are reduced
 - insisting on high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing the incidence of poor behaviour and lack of engagement in learning
 - improving the attendance of pupils and reducing the proportion who are persistently absent

- ensuring that relationships between pupils are positive so they understand how to play cooperatively together.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 to 20 September 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work. They scrutinised school documents, and met with the leaders, the trust, governors and teachers. Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons to gather their views and listened to them read. Inspectors and leaders conducted lesson visits and scrutinised pupils' work across a range of subject and year groups. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times.

Context

Since the last visit, there have been some staff changes, including in the early years. The executive headteacher left the school in April 2019. The current headteacher's contract has been extended until August 2020. One governor has left. Central staff from the trust are supporting the school improvement team more flexibly, recognising the increased leadership capacity at the school. A new leader of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) took up role this term.

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

Leaders continue to work with determination to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. Where whole-school systems have been dysfunctional in the past, leaders are quickly ironing these weaknesses out. Their work is making a notable difference to the culture and ethos of the school for its pupils. Parents can see improvements too. However, it is taking time to regain full parental confidence. Leaders know that there are no quick fixes. Leaders are determined in their action to improve parental involvement and regain trust.

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes at school. Inspectors saw hardly any poor behaviour. When this does occur, staff manage this in line with the school's behaviour policy effectively.

Most pupils respond to questions and engage in their lessons positively. They take pride in their work because of the higher expectations that teachers have. Pupils feel safe in school and most report that they enjoy attending. They like the new assemblies and rewards that the school offers. Pupils play well together at social times and cooperate in lessons. Pupils' exclusions over the last four months have reduced markedly. Exclusions are now infrequent. Pupils who were out of class in the past, or off-timetable, now get full access to the curriculum and learning time. No pupils attend part-time.

Much effective work has gone into improving pastoral support for pupils. The coordinated approach of the pastoral support team, school leaders and staff is taking

hold well. The few pupils who find it more difficult to comply can usually control their behaviour and get back on track in lessons. Leaders' work to reduce pupils' absence is paying off. However, there are still too many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, who do not attend regularly enough.

Leaders do not shy away from making difficult decisions to bring about school-wide improvement. The deputy headteacher being out of class has bolstered leaders' capacity to coach and support staff and drive up the quality of education in all classes. While in its infancy, this work is already bringing about important improvements.

Leaders are taking action to change the way teachers plan pupils' work over time. The sequencing of what is taught within and across units of work is much better thought out in English and mathematics. Curriculum plans in these subjects are increasingly ambitious for pupils. Teaching is getting much better in core subjects, including science. However, this better teaching is not yet seen in the proportions of pupils who have the knowledge and skills appropriate for their age.

Nevertheless, leaders' work to ensure that pupils who have gaps in their learning catch up well is now gathering momentum. Leaders are helping teachers plan work that is ambitious for pupils in all year groups. Carefully planned staff training is improving staff subject knowledge. As a result, many pupils, including the most able, are receiving the right work. However, the curriculum is not yet supporting pupils who struggle with their work or those with SEND well enough. Some sequences of work do not reflect what pupils need to learn next or pupils' learning is not tailored precisely enough.

Pupils in key stage 2 who received extra reading last year are catching up. Many of these pupils now read with greater accuracy. Teaching sequences show higher expectations for pupils. Pupils explore the texts they read with increasing confidence. They use reading sessions to boost their knowledge in other curriculum areas. Early indicators suggest that pupils are rising to this challenge and enjoy it. Pupils who need it are given extra help to prepare them to understand the meaning of new vocabulary. Yet, this work is in its infancy and there is not yet demonstrable impact. Extra events such as attending the local literature festival are raising the profile of reading in the school.

Leaders have not yet established a coordinated approach to help pupils who have struggled to read in the early years and Year 1. Most teachers have appropriate subject knowledge to teach phonics lessons well. However, teachers do too little to make sure that pupils who have fallen behind can read whole words and sentences accurately. Teachers do not check the content of reading books pupils take home closely. Pupils' reading books are not matched well enough to the phonics that pupils are being taught. This limits pupils' confidence to read.

Children in early years are receiving phonics teaching right from the start. They are keen to learn and practise their phonics learning.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are identifying where the curriculum needs upgrading. This work has already started in science. Science work this term is providing pupils with the right depth of knowledge. Many pupils started the year with a shortfall in their science knowledge. So, teachers are introducing scientific knowledge that pupils should have learned when they were further down the school, along with new concepts this term. Pupils are showing a keen interest in science. As a result, pupils in key stage 2 are working with determination to catch up.

Leaders' new planning regime in science is still at the early stages. There is not yet a clear planned progression of what should be taught in science and when. Leaders intend to update other curriculum subjects. However, this work has not yet started.

Leaders have done much work to ensure that teachers make accurate assessments of what pupils know and remember. Most teachers use their assessments to inform future teaching. Some staff are new to the year group they teach, or they are returning after an extended absence. Leaders are providing comprehensive training for these staff. However, a few teachers do not use their assessments well enough to adjust their teaching.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have had to address many complex problems at the same time. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are a strong partnership. Their systematic approach is already bringing about much improvement.

Leaders are building a successful team of teachers and emerging leaders. Staff support the changes to the way they work and strive to improve their teaching. Leaders know what they need to do next. Leaders have the capacity to remedy pupils' gaps in learning. They are prioritising improving the quality of education from this term. Trust leaders know that it is too early to see the full impact of leaders' work to improve the quality of education. There has not yet been enough time to embed all planned improvements.

The new special educational needs coordinator is working determinedly to improve the quality of education for pupils with SEND. She is prioritising meeting with staff to check how well teaching meets pupils' needs. Her work is identifying pupils' needs accurately. Pupils who were wrongly identified have been removed from the register.

The trust's improvement work is enabling middle leaders to understand their roles. However, there is still more scope for them to improve the impact of their work. The trust has heightened its evaluation of all aspects of the school's work. They provide leaders with the right advice. For example, the most recent visit shifted leaders' focus to early reading.

Trust staff and governors focus precisely on the school's improvement priorities. Recent governors' training is paying off. Governors now check the impact of the pupil premium stringently. They make insightful visits by linking their work to the priorities in

the school improvement plan. They are holding school leaders to account much more effectively.

Trust leaders acknowledge the importance of a clear action plan to cement school improvement. However, some of the school's most pertinent planned improvements are not identified well enough on the school's action plan. Some milestones for improvement across the year are being reviewed. Leaders are refining the action plan so that it includes the depth of work planned.

Pupils feel safe in school. Staff know how to apply their safeguarding training when they have concerns. Safeguarding records are fit for purpose.

Leaders have used the advice of the local authority to improve the curriculum in the additional resource base. The staff there are completing training in phonics. They continue to develop their use of assessments and planning well.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school has thought carefully about its staffing structure. By doing this, it has increased the capacity and drive for universal improvement.
- The headteacher and his team have prioritised immediate improvements to pupils' behaviour. This has set very successful foundations for pupils to learn well.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Despite considerable work by leaders and the trust, the school's plans have not yet reduced pupils' gaps in learning well enough. Pupils who struggle to read are not yet catching up well enough.

External support

The school does not receive regular support to improve the quality of education outside of the trust. However, the school has used advice from external advisers to strengthen the school's systems to keep pupils safe and ensure that they attend well. Local authority training has improved staff's behaviour management skills. Additional advice from the local authority is enabling more precise planning for pupils with SEND in the resource base.