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Mrs Alison Emmerson
Marden Vale CofE Academy
William Street
Calne
Wiltshire
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Dear Mrs Emmerson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marden Vale CofE Academy

Following my visit to your school on 28 to 29 January 2020, 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 third 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.

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 third monitoring inspection on 28 January 2020 to 29 January 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work. She scrutinised documents and met with leaders at all levels, including the multi-academy trust (MAT) staff who are responsible for school improvement, and the local governing board. The inspector held conversations with the chief executive of the trust and a group of trustees. She met with a group of teachers from other schools in the MAT, in their capacity as lead teachers. The inspector talked to pupils about their learning and experiences of school. This visit focused predominantly on the impact of leadership and management and quality of education.

Context

The interim headteacher left the school in December 2019. The new headteacher took up her role in January 2020. Levels of staff absence increased last term. This is stabilising now. There are two new parent governors. The acting chair of the local governing board has stepped down from her duties at central trust level to focus on improving governance at Marden Vale. The trust has restructured and changed the way it provides its support.

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

Leaders are addressing the fundamental weaknesses in the school's reading curriculum head-on. They have taken strident steps in the right direction over the last 10 weeks. Getting pupils reading is now everyone's priority. Pupils who struggle are starting to get better support. Younger pupils' reading books match the sounds that they have previously learned. This means that they are practising more and getting more enjoyment when reading books. The indoor and outdoor spaces in the early years classroom are increasingly full of books and words to read. Staff subject knowledge in phonics is improving steadily, including in the school's specialist resource base and in the early years. Leaders have planned further training to deepen staff subject knowledge.

Older pupils are increasing the accuracy and speed of their reading. Leaders' actions are building firm foundations in developing pupils' basic reading knowledge and skills, as well as widening pupils' vocabulary. The school's approach is beginning to take hold well. However, it is taking time for pupils who have previously underachieved to catch up. Consequently, there are too few pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, with the reading skills and knowledge they should have. Work given to pupils to develop the understanding of what they read is not yet helping pupils well enough in a few year groups.

Leaders' work to bring about improvements to the way teachers plan the curriculum for subjects other than English and mathematics has stalled. This is due to a range of issues, including staff absence. However, the new headteacher is bringing fresh ideas and momentum. She has a clear vision for what she wants to do to develop the quality of education for pupils. She articulates, with energy, how she will 'raise the bar' so that teachers have higher expectations to make sure that pupils learn more and remember more. However, teachers need more training to make this happen. Teachers do not yet have secure enough subject knowledge to design an ambitious curriculum and teach it well.

Where curriculum work has been sustained, such as in science, there is a planned progression of what should be taught and when. Teachers are using their plans to ensure that pupils are securing the scientific knowledge that they have missed previously. Increasingly, pupils are learning more in science, and they are enjoying it.

An increasing number of teachers are getting better at identifying pupils' gaps in learning. Teachers plan sequences of work that identify what pupils need to learn. However, too often teachers' plans are not delivered with enough clarity. Teachers do not check pupils' understanding or help pupils effectively when they struggle. In recent weeks, an 'improving teaching programme' is providing teachers with additional training, coaching and support. This work is only just starting in some year groups and, so, it is too recent to see notable impact yet.

Teachers are working more closely with the leader for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to ensure that pupils have the right resources to help them learn. However, pupils' individualised learning targets remain too broad or teachers are not using pupils' targets well in lessons. Teaching is not yet meeting pupils' abilities well enough.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes continue to improve. Pupils are compliant. They work well in pairs and small groups together. Pupils are beginning to catch up. Pupils say that behaviour at school is getting better and they feel safe.

However, teachers' expectations of what pupils can learn and achieve must be lifted further for pupils to gain more stamina and become determined to learn more. A minority of pupils do not get the work they need to deepen their understanding. Therefore, this limits the amount of practice they get to gain the essential knowledge they need to do well.

Staff changes, and a legacy of poor communication to parents, are still creating some unrest among a small number of parents. The new headteacher is keen to improve communication. For example, a recent parental survey is much more positive and provides a transparent view of what changes need to be made. Reading workshops are being offered to support parents help their children read at home.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The trust's work is bringing stability to the school. The trust has secured a permanent headteacher successfully. Training and support, and the involvement of central trust staff in local academy improvement meetings helps improve governors' skills. Governors conduct their own safeguarding checks to secure their understanding of the culture of safeguarding in the school.

The chair of the local governing body and her team ask pertinent questions about each aspect of the school's improvement plan. They send very clear messages to school leaders when timescales are not met, or further improvement work is expected. They follow this up in meetings and expect improvements to be made. However, while their challenge is strong, its impact at school level, to ensure that all pupils gain the knowledge and skills they should, is not showing well enough. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not learn enough.

Alongside trust leaders, the deputy headteacher has played a vital role in ensuring a smooth transition between headteachers. This work allowed the new headteacher to get a transparent view of the impact of the school's work straight away. She is working quickly to get to grips with what needs to be done immediately, and in the short term. The headteacher is communicating her high expectations to staff and pupils already and gaining their trust.

Leaders are providing clearer guidance about what improvements they are expecting, and by when they are to be achieved. However, some support work to improve the quality of education has not happened as swiftly as trust leaders had planned. Staff absence levels have been high, and this has been a stumbling block to secure some aspects of school-wide improvement. As a consequence, some teachers have had more support to improve than others. This is leading to inconsistencies in the pace of improvement overall.

Trust leaders are adopting a more practical and 'hands on' approach to school improvement. They are working alongside leaders to bolster leadership capacity. Bringing in support from other MAT schools is helping to make explicit the necessary changes that must happen to raise teachers' expectations further.

Leaders' work is bringing about improvements in the most pressing areas, such as reading. Nonetheless, the headteacher is clear that greater urgency is needed to bring about demonstrable improvements to the quality of education pupils receive. She is keen to establish a curriculum that goes well beyond preparing pupils for end-of-key-stage tests. However, it is too soon to see any obvious impact of her intended actions.

Leaders' actions have ensured that the school is now, routinely, a calm and purposeful place to learn. Much that was previously dysfunctional, on a day-to-day

level, has been sorted out. Leaders have sustained the improvements in pupils' behaviour. Pupils are enjoying school more and, so, more pupils are attending well.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust has been successful in securing a permanent headteacher. This is already providing stability for staff and setting clear direction for what needs to happen next.
- Leaders are tackling pupils' underperformance in reading. This coordinated approach is beginning to help more pupils to read accurately.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Some aspects of the school's improvement work stalled last term. In order to bolster leadership capacity, the trust has responded quickly and implemented a carefully planned coaching and support programme. There are early indications that this programme is helping to remedy weaknesses in teachers' delivery of lessons. However, there is not yet sufficient emphasis on developing teachers' subject knowledge in the subjects they teach. Leaders need to ensure that the coaching and support programme has a strong impact in improving teachers' subject knowledge, and teachers' ongoing assessments across sequences of work, so that the quality of education improves rapidly for pupils.

External support

The resource base has received support from the local authority. The school has used the local authority advice to improve the way staff plan, including the teaching of reading. However, visits to other schools to see strong examples of teaching that the local authority recommended are yet to happen.

Trust leaders have ensured that school leaders are working productively with the Ramsbury English Hub. This is helping to upskill the reading leaders and provide additional training for staff.

The school continues to draw on support from the educational welfare officer to help with improving pupils' attendance.