

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
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Adam Evans  
Minehead First School  
Townsend Road  
Minehead  
Somerset  
TA24 5RG

Dear Mr Evans

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Minehead First School**

Following my visit to your school on 26–27 February 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 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 April 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 development plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Somerset. 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 April 2019**

- Rapidly improve the quality of leadership and management to ensure that:
  - the trust holds leaders, including governors, rigorously to account for all aspects of the school's performance, including how effectively the pupil premium funding is used to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils
  - an ambitious culture for pupils pervades the school and expectations across the school rise
  - the professional support and guidance being offered to the school are effective in raising standards
  - subject leaders play an active role in improving standards across the school.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that:
  - information about pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is used successfully to plan challenging lessons that meet pupils' needs
  - the curriculum is planned systematically to ensure that pupils' skills are developed as they move through the school.
- Improve outcomes for pupils so that pupils in every year group, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, make the progress they should.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
  - rapidly improving expectations for behaviour so that incidents of poor behaviour, particularly in key stage 2, are reduced
  - ensuring that leaders analyse bullying and behaviour incidents so that patterns are identified, and appropriate strategies are put in place
  - raising expectations of how pupils should present their work
  - improving pupils' attendance so that fewer school days are missed because of absence
  - ensuring that pupils develop strong, positive attitudes towards their learning and that they have high aspirations for their future.

An external review of governance is recommended.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is recommended.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 February 2020 to 27 February 2020**

### **Evidence**

The inspector undertook visits to all year groups, including the Nursery. He scrutinised documents and met with pupils, staff and parents. He also held discussions with trust leaders, including the chief executive officer, members of the interim academy board (IAB) and the school's external improvement adviser. The inspector also spoke to pupils to find out their views of the school. The inspection also looked at 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 teaching in the school. This involved speaking with curriculum leaders, observing phonics teaching and pupils in the Reception Year to Year 2.

### **Context**

There have been staffing changes and an overhaul of governance since the previous inspection. The executive headteacher, who had only been in post for two days at the time of the last inspection, has remained. In addition, the school has appointed an assistant headteacher with responsibilities for teaching and learning. Three teachers have joined the school. The trust removed the previous local governing board and replaced this with an IAB. All four members of the IAB are trustees. The trust has used external services and advisers to undertake regular reviews of the school's performance.

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

The executive headteacher has been a catalyst for change. He quickly identified the right priorities for improvement and, together with willing staff, has successfully started to change the school's culture. Morale is high. Pupils, staff and parents are proud of Minehead First School. However, there is more work needed to ensure that pupils benefit from a well-planned and sequenced curriculum so that they can achieve well in all subjects.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have reviewed what they want pupils to know in different subjects. Teaching in some subjects, such as science, reading (including phonics) and mathematics, has improved well. In these subjects, teachers know what they expect pupils to learn, and by when. Clear expectations help to set out effective sequences of learning. As a result, pupils know and remember more. They can recall previous learning and use this to build their knowledge to achieve well.

For example, the approach to teaching numbers is well established from Nursery to Year 4. This enables pupils to count reliably and work with numbers to solve complex problems. In science, pupils are gaining knowledge, including how to work scientifically and conduct their own simple tests.

Leaders have taken effective action to improve reading. Pupils read regularly and for different purposes. Teachers read interesting stories to pupils, who are gripped. Pupils speak positively about reading. The older pupils enjoy taking reading quizzes. They are keen to read new books. The school is well stocked with different types of books for all tastes and ages. However, some pupils still find reading difficult. Too many pupils still do not know enough words for their age or know what they mean. Leaders are aware of this and are taking the right steps to help pupils to catch up.

There is a robust phonics programme. This sets out precisely the letters and sounds that pupils must know, and by when. Teachers frequently check pupils' knowledge and hear them read. As a result, pupils' phonics books are well matched to the sounds they are learning. Pupils, starting from the Reception Year, are now learning to read with more speed, confidence and accuracy than before. Parents also have a good understanding of the school's phonics programme. However, the school does not yet have a strong enough process for helping pupils who complete the phonics programme and can choose books for themselves. Some pupils flounder at this vital stage, including not being able to use their phonic knowledge to spell accurately. Too many pupils make repeated spelling errors which teachers do not tackle quickly enough.

Pupils enjoy lots of different subjects and activities. For example, they love to play the ukulele in Year 3 music lessons. There are lots of trips, visits and events which excite them, such as 'Roman' day. However, the curriculum is not planned well enough to provide pupils with the deep, joined-up knowledge they need to achieve well in all subjects. The curriculum is under review. New plans in history, for example, have not yet been implemented. Leaders are in the process of developing small steps of knowledge in all subjects so that pupils can achieve well in these too. In addition, the curriculum is not planned well enough to enable pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding by making links between subjects. There are still too many gaps in pupils' basic spelling, punctuation and grammar. This still holds pupils back and prevents them from being well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Since the previous inspection, staff have introduced a consistent approach to behaviour which has raised everybody's expectations. The introduction of the six golden rules provides pupils with a meaningful code of conduct. Pupils like these rules and understand why they are important. They know that some behaviour is no longer tolerated. If an incident happens, however, pupils say that staff are quick to respond, and consequences are always fair. Pupils conduct themselves well around school. They are highly motivated to earn prestigious e-points which are turned into online spending currency for rewards. Attendance is improving well. Exclusions have

fallen markedly. Pupils say they feel safe and happy. Along with parents and staff, they welcome the strong improvements in behaviour and attitudes.

Staff take much time and care to make every pupil feel appreciated. Pupils are free to make choices and like to be involved in running the school. There are many pupil helpers, including pudding servers and sports leaders at lunchtimes. Pupils like these roles and take pride in how they help others. The school actively promotes equality. For example, boys attend knitting and dance clubs, and there is a girls' football team that is doing well. Pupils are keen to help each other and know that this is important in continuing to make the school as good as it can be. However, there are too many occasions when pupils do not take enough pride in their work. Pupils' presentation, including their writing and handwriting, often is not good enough. Pupils sometimes lack the care or perseverance to do the very best they can, particularly when they are not interested in what they are learning about.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Trust leaders acknowledge that they were too slow to tackle the weaknesses that led to the school being placed in special measures. However, since the previous inspection, the trust has taken effective action to secure strong improvement. The replacement of the governing board with the IAB has enabled trustees to focus well on weaknesses and provide robust challenge to school leaders.

Senior leaders want the best for every pupil. They have raised the expectations of all. Leaders have introduced systems to check how well pupils are learning. Leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), meet with teachers to agree the next steps and challenges for pupils, including in the Reception Year. The SENCo ensures that parents are informed and consulted when making plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, targets setting out next steps for too many of these pupils are not sufficiently precise. As a result, some pupils with SEND are not achieving as well as they could.

The trust and senior leaders have provided effective training for subject leaders. As a result, subject leaders are now working well to improve their areas of responsibility. They have appropriate plans in place. These are securing the necessary improvements, particularly in science, phonics and mathematics. However, the quality of education remains too weak in other subjects. For example, recently devised plans for history and geography have not yet been implemented. Pupils still do not achieve well enough in all subjects.

Safeguarding arrangements in the school are effective. Leaders make sure that all necessary checks are carried out before staff, volunteers or visitors can work with pupils. Staff are diligent and tenacious. They know what to do to look after pupils, including referring any concerns they may have about pupils. Leaders work effectively with a range of external partners to keep pupils safe. Pupils know how to stay safe in different situations. For example, they know what personal information

they must protect online and how to evacuate the school safely in the event of an emergency.

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

- The headteacher and leadership team know what needs to be done to improve the school. Their plans and actions are well founded on accurate assessments and information to secure the necessary improvement.
- The IAB has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is putting in the right support and challenge to help leaders improve the school.

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

- The curriculum is not well planned and sequenced to ensure that pupils can achieve well enough in all subjects.
- Targets for pupils with SEND are not sufficiently precise to enable them to do the best that they can.

**External support**

The trust has commissioned external school improvement services to help provide an impartial view of the school's effectiveness. It has also commissioned an external review of its pupil premium strategy.