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Dear Mrs Bracken

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Hatherden Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Alice Roberts, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 18 and 19 May 2021, 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 to improve the school since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in July 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Winchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 May 2021

Context

Since the school's first monitoring inspection in February 2020, the number of pupils on roll has decreased notably. Most staff and governors are new in post. There is now one class in key stage 1 and one in key stage 2. Children in the early years are taught in their own class for four mornings per week and join the key stage 1 class for the rest of their learning. The key stage 2 teacher took up post in April 2020 and became mathematics leader in January 2021. The key stage 1 teacher, who is also the literacy leader, joined the school in November 2020 as maternity leave cover. There is one learning support assistant, who is employed on a temporary basis and joined the school part-way through the summer term of 2021. The chair of governors was appointed in July 2020. Only one of the previous governors remains in post.

During the autumn term of 2020, the school was closed for two weeks due to an outbreak of COVID-19. Between January and March 2021, approximately half of the pupils learned at home while schools in England were partially closed due to coronavirus restrictions.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Safeguarding arrangements are now effective. Leaders' recruitment checks on adults' suitability are rigorous and timely. Safeguarding policies and practices are clear and understood. Adults coming to work at the school receive relevant safeguarding information in a timely way. Systems for recording concerns about pupils are appropriate. Leaders act promptly to address any concerns that may arise, holding each other to account for the decisions that they make. Pupils describe feeling more confident now in reporting any concerns they may have than in the past. They know who to speak to and are confident that adults will act in their best interests. Governors make robust checks on the suitability of safeguarding arrangements. During the recent period of local restrictions linked to COVID-19, they have not visited the school to see how these arrangements support the safeguarding culture.

Leaders' work to improve the curriculum remains ongoing. A number of factors have impeded the pace of this urgently needed work. Managing changes to the school's structure and leadership led to some initial momentum being lost. Leaders have done some further work to identify what pupils will learn each year, particularly in science, history and geography. However, this work does not currently extend across all of the subjects that pupils learn. Leaders are still considering how to manage delivering their planned sequence of learning within mixed-age classes so that pupils do not miss vital building blocks or encounter them in the wrong order. The

local authority is providing practical support and additional capacity to school leaders to help them move this aspect of school improvement forward more rapidly.

Leaders have taken useful steps to raise the profile of reading across the school. Younger pupils now have access to books that broadly match the letters and sounds that they have learned. The selection of books available in the school library has been refreshed and daily reading has been introduced in key stage 2. Younger pupils are encouraged to read every day with an adult, at home or at school. The impact of leaders' work to promote a love of reading is most evident in key stage 2. Older pupils talk confidently about the range of high-quality texts they have read, with a clear understanding of vocabulary and themes. They apply what they know to their own writing across different genres.

Pupils in early years and key stage 1 participate in daily phonics sessions. Adults have identified where pupils have not securely grasped the letters and sounds they learned while the school was partially closed during the spring term. They are sensibly revisiting this work before moving on to new learning. Pupils who need extra help with reading receive timely and appropriate support. Teachers are currently undertaking additional training to help develop the precision with which phonics is taught.

Staff work well together and are supportive of each other, sharing both expertise and workload. They are firmly committed to making the necessary improvements and to doing their best for the pupils in their care. The English and mathematics leaders feel well supported by the headteacher, who is mindful of their, and her own, significant workload. Local authority advisers help staff to develop their curriculum leadership expertise, focusing initially on the phase in which they teach. Governors are mindful of the substantial challenges that staff face in managing their own workload while achieving sufficiently rapid improvements in the school.

The size and make-up of the governing body have changed considerably since the first routine monitoring inspection in February 2020. The current group of governors are yet to meet in person as a group, having carried out their work virtually during the pandemic. Nevertheless, they have an accurate understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. Governors made a pragmatic decision to focus on one school improvement area at a time, starting with safeguarding. Consequently, their oversight of, and focus on, curriculum improvements are currently limited. Governors recognise the need to develop their expertise around an approach to this element of their work. They have taken initial tentative steps, but know there is much more to do to strengthen their focus on this aspect of school improvement.

Additional support

The local authority and diocese continue to invest heavily in supporting the school. By coordinating their work, this is enabling leaders to concentrate on a streamlined

set of school-improvement priorities. Currently, local authority and diocesan support are focused around curriculum planning. This work is freeing up school leaders' capacity to focus on other priorities and the day-to-day running of the school. Governors are making sensible use of support from the local authority and diocese to develop their shared understanding of how to carry out their role effectively.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher and both class teachers to discuss work done to improve the school since the last routine monitoring inspection. Inspectors visited classrooms, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work. The lead inspector spoke separately with representatives of the local authority, diocese and governing body. Inspectors considered the school's safeguarding arrangements. They looked at the central record of recruitment checks on adults working at the school. Inspectors considered 19 responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire, one free-text response from a parent and two responses to the staff survey.