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20 July 2023

Annemarie Lewis  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Annemarie Lewis

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Bloemfontein Primary School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 20 June 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in November 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust and the vice-chair of the board of trustees the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work, discussed learning with pupils and scrutinised a range of documentation, including the action planning for improvement. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Bloemfontein Primary School remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.**

### **The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation**

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership, governance and staffing. The trust board has appointed an interim executive board (IEB) to provide stable governance for the school. The previous headteacher began to initiate change prior to leaving the school. You supported her in implementing some of the changes before you

became acting headteacher in June 2023. Several members of staff have left the school team. The trust has arranged for new staff who have experience in successful school improvement to be seconded, along with you, to the school on a long-term basis. The new assistant headteacher is leading on the early years provision and phonics. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust has been very involved in overseeing the improvement plan and supporting the school team.

Due to the significant changes in leadership, this inspection focused on leaders' plans to improve the curriculum in early reading, including the delivery of phonics, and the early years provision.

After the last Ofsted inspection, the trust CEO and the previous headteacher developed an improvement action plan. However, the intended actions could not be fully implemented due to staff absence and changes in personnel. This situation has now been stabilised. As a result of increased monitoring in school, there is greater clarity in understanding exactly what needs to change in order to improve standards. The most recent action plan is analytical and sets out ambitious and realistic targets for future improvement.

The CEO has rightly prioritised the development of the early years provision and the reading curriculum through the professional development of staff. However, he has been mindful of the importance of supporting staff well-being and workload. He has ensured that staff understand what changes need to be made and why. Staff members told me that the changes are making a positive difference for them, and more importantly, for pupils. The atmosphere in the school is purposeful and focused.

Improving pupils' reading remains a priority. You have ensured that staff receive regular training to implement the school's chosen approach to teaching phonics. The trust buys additional consultancy time, which includes monitoring visits of phonics lessons. Additional resources have been purchased to develop reading fluency as pupils move from the phonics scheme in Years 2 and 3. Resources are well matched to pupils' phonics knowledge. A rigorous assessment system is in place, which helps teachers identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. However, there are some inconsistencies in the approach staff members take in organising the phonics sessions in order to maximise learning. Teaching points in some aspects of the lessons are sometimes laboured at the expense of developing fluency in reading. Some staff members seem hesitant in their role, especially during peer reading sessions.

Some pupils in Year 1 have excelled in phonics knowledge and are working above age-related expectations. However, some groups of pupils, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are yet to make accelerated progress to catch up with where they should be. Leaders have identified where further improvements will impact on pupils' learning. They recognise that further staff training is needed to ensure that lessons are adapted effectively in order to meet the needs of all pupils.

Much has been done to improve the early years provision in the school. Staff have worked with consultancy support to create an early years environment that is warm, caring and

welcoming. The learning areas are now clearly defined and well-resourced in the classrooms. Staff actively show the children how to use the equipment. There is a keen focus on developing children's communication skills. Staff have received additional training in early language programmes. They are supporting children in learning pre-reading skills effectively. Structured planning for all areas of the curriculum is in place for this term. The early years leader is working with staff to develop longer term plans. This includes the provision in the outdoor area, which has already been moved from the school yard to a more attractive setting.

You are aware that some children in early years have been unsettled due to some changes in teaching personnel. You have identified that they may need additional support with the transition into Year 1. This may include access to some aspects of the early years continuous provision. The early years leader has begun work on identifying any gaps in children's learning. She has introduced a comprehensive assessment system, to which all who work in early years contribute. The leader has plans to bolster the partnership between school and parents.

Parents have been kept up to date with letters and messages informing them of some of the key changes. However, some parents have also been unsettled by the change of staff and some routines. You have further communications planned to update parents on developments in school.

The CEO and the previous headteacher put a carefully planned programme of professional development in place for all staff. You are now continuing to support staff through your own expertise, colleagues from the trust and consultants from external sources. With so many changes in staffing, this external support is necessary. Staff are enthusiastic about adopting new ideas to support pupils' learning.

You have reviewed the use of the safeguarding record-keeping system. Staff have had training in what should be recorded. They understand that any small change in a pupil's behaviour may indicate a change in circumstances. They know where and how to log their observations and concerns.

Members of the IEB have agreed terms of reference for their involvement in the leadership of the school. They have begun to hold senior leaders to account by asking pertinent questions. The IEB has planned appropriate monitoring activities to be undertaken in the next twelve months, all of which focus on the priorities for improvement.

The trust board arranged a review of the overall governance of the trust by an independent adviser. The results of this review have not yet been published. However, trustees have taken advice from another trust in order to establish a more robust approach to monitoring all schools within the Stanley Learning Partnership. A new standards committee has been introduced. The committee has been delegated the role of holding the CEO and the schools within the trust to account. The chair of the new

committee also sits on the IEB and is therefore ideally placed to report on the progress being made at Bloemfontein.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Stanley Learning Partnership multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for County Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Cook  
**His Majesty's Inspector**