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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Annemarie Lewis
Headteacher
Bloemfontein Primary School
The Middles
Craghead
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 6AG

Dear Miss Lewis

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Bloemfontein Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 7 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in November 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff and the chair of the interim governing board 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.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Since the last inspection, there have been further changes in leadership and staffing. Several members of staff have left the school's workforce. The CEO has arranged for an experienced teacher to be seconded on a long-term basis from another school in the trust. The assistant headteacher is leading on wider curriculum provision, including geography and history, as well as early years and phonics. School improvement work is being supported by the trust's newly appointed director of education (DOE). The CEO continues to be very involved in overseeing the implementation of the improvement plan and supporting the school's workforce.

The work that the school has done to improve the teaching of reading, including the delivery of phonics, has been very successful. Pupils have made rapid progress in reading since the inspection in November 2022. Pupils leaving Year 6 in 2023 were well prepared in reading for their next stage in their education. However, in other subjects such as mathematics, the rate of progress is not as rapid. Outcomes in mathematics at the end of 2023 in key stages 1 and 2 remain weak.

The mathematics curriculum is well established and ambitious. Staff are supported well by an experienced subject leader. They have benefited from professional development opportunities and show expertise in the teaching of mathematics. In lessons, adults support pupils with the apparatus that they need so that pupils can understand increasingly complex concepts. Pupils are taught appropriate strategies to use in calculations, and they apply these with increasing confidence. There is a working buzz in mathematics lessons. The structures are in place to deliver the mathematics curriculum. However, the gaps in the pupils' prior learning are too great to overcome in a short period of time. Leaders are aware of what these gaps are. They are ensuring that pupils catch up in mathematics. A new method of teaching multiplication in Year 4 has been particularly successful. This is being replicated in other year groups.

New curriculum documents have been put in place for geography and history. These include comprehensive guidance for staff on how to deliver the curriculum, along with suggested resources. There is a gradual build-up of subject knowledge for pupils. Some key concepts are revisited, such as monarchy and civilisation. There are clear end points for each topic area. The new curriculum plans in geography have been delivered in class since September 2023. Year 6 pupils spoke with confidence about their geography learning, recalling facts about Brazil and the difference in living standards within Rio de Janeiro. Year 5 pupils could recall their learning of the physical characteristics of rivers. However, they were less certain on where major rivers of the world are located. This term, the school has made effective progress in establishing the knowledge to be delivered across curriculum subjects. It is too early to evaluate the success of this improvement work on pupils' outcomes.

Teachers have been given more ownership and responsibility in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. The special educational needs coordinator has trained teachers to

identify the precise needs of pupils. Teachers are more aware of the variety of support that can be offered to pupils to help them access the curriculum. Adaptations are being made to the way in which lessons are delivered in class. For example, adults are providing additional verbal prompts and practical apparatus in mathematics. Support plans are being reviewed with parents, carers and pupils. All are celebrating successes and know what the next steps in learning are.

The changes that you and your staff have made to the early years curriculum are being embedded well. More pupils are entering Year 1 with a good level of development. All children in the early years now have access to basic provision, such as snacks throughout the session.

Since my last monitoring inspection, you have further reviewed the use of the safeguarding record-keeping system. More members of staff have been trained as designated safeguarding leads. The new processes are more rigorous in highlighting pupils who may be at risk of harm. This, quite correctly, has led to an increase in the number of referrals being made to external agencies.

The school's action plan to bring about positive change has been updated to reflect the progress being made and the next areas for development. The CEO and the DOE work alongside you to provide a carefully planned programme of professional development for all staff. There is also continuing support from external consultants. They report back favourably on the impact of their work. However, this improvement work has not been checked or evaluated by the trust or by the interim executive board (IEB).

Members of the IEB are not sufficiently involved in reviewing the changes being made in school. There is no overall strategy or monitoring plan to evaluate the resources purchased to bring about school improvement. This includes the use of external consultants. There is an over-reliance on accepting reports from officers within the trust.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Stanley Learning Partnership, 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