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16 July 2024

Laura Mackie
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Dear Ms Mackie

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Minehead Middle School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 26 June 2024, 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 January 2023.

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 your senior leadership team, the interim chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of trustees, the chair of the interim academy board, the attendance officer and a head of year 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 spoke with the CEO and deputy CEO of Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust (MAT). I met with two groups of pupils and visited lessons to review provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils' behaviour and attitudes. 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 monitoring visit, the deputy headteacher has taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). You have also appointed an attendance officer. The trust is in the advanced stages of a merger with Bath and Wells MAT, ready for 1 September 2024. The focus of this monitoring visit was the impact of leaders' work on SEND provision and the management of behaviour.

You, with the enthusiastic support of your senior leadership team and trust leaders, continue to build momentum in improving provision. You have invested most of your energy in continuing to ensure you have the right staff in the right positions to bring about sustained improvement. As a result, for the first time in three years, the school looks likely to be fully staffed in September, including in all leadership positions. You recognise this milestone is significant, because you are now much better placed to provide strategic leadership, following a long period of tackling operational deficits.

Your work to improve behaviour is gaining momentum. The leadership of behaviour is clearly delegated and understood. Staff are clearer about what is expected, particularly in lessons. This is supported by the improved stability in staffing. Pupils' behaviour overall is continuing to improve, particularly when familiar staff are teaching them. However, you know there is more work to do. For example, your higher expectations of pupils are not consistently applied by staff. This is particularly the case when challenging tardiness, pupils' presentation and silliness when transitioning around the school. Similarly, some pupils are still finding your new expectations hard to live up to.

All of this is reflected in your effective analysis of behaviour records. The impact of your work can be seen in the reduction in low-level incidents at the school. There has also been an increase in the rewards you offer for pupils who show strong attitudes to learning. However, high-level incidents and the use of suspensions have increased. Your use of suspensions is appropriate. There are robust systems that staff follow diligently to ensure that the decision to suspend is appropriate and that reasonable adjustments have been made for pupils with SEND. The increase in suspensions is partly due to the raised expectations and the need for pupils to adjust to them. You are rightly expecting to see suspensions now reduce as your higher expectations embed and staffing stabilises.

The school now has better capacity to challenge poor attendance. You now work diligently with the local authority to utilise considered strategies and approaches to improve attendance. Whereas this has improved pupils' attendance overall, you are rightly focused on reducing persistent absence, which has remained stubbornly at the same level for some time. Nevertheless, lateness and tardiness between lessons are being addressed. The number of pupils recorded as late has nearly halved since your arrival.

Since taking on the role of SENCo, your deputy headteacher has completed a full review of provision. This has sensibly included giving dedicated time to speak to parents, staff and pupils to understand what is working and where improvements are needed. Your

work to improve engagement with the community, including parents of pupils with SEND, is sensible and there are early signs of improvement. However, due to a legacy of weakness and high turnover in key positions, the community's trust in the school remains fragile. The deputy headteacher has usefully revisited the roles of learning support assistants to ensure that their work is more focused on supporting pupils to learn alongside their peers, as well as building on the use of the 'connect room' which is now a valued part of the school's provision for SEND.

There are signs that the adjustments being made to SEND provision are having greater impact. The systems and processes around SEND provision are stronger and more robust. This is particularly the case for how pupils' wider needs are met. For example, staff are better at understanding how to help pupils who need sensory breaks to reduce the presentation of more complex behaviour. You rightly acknowledge the next step is to focus on ensuring the curriculum is fit for purpose for all pupils. Pupils with SEND say that teachers are better at understanding their needs. However, they also rightly say some teachers are less adept at helping them to remember the curriculum long term.

You have made effective use of external support and scrutiny to improve your impact. Your recent work with the local authority on attendance and SEND provision are examples of this. You have already invested significant time in working with trust leaders from the Bath and Wells MAT to ensure that the merger supports the continued development of the school. Similarly, you have sensibly utilised useful feedback from external advisers to consider how you might improve the curriculum at the school to better meet the needs of its pupils and the community.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the interim CEO or equivalent of the Beacon Education Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
His Majesty's Inspector