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24 January 2025

Ruth Laing  
Interim Headteacher  
Willow Park CofE Primary School  
Park Lane  
St Michael's Hill  
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Dear Mrs Laing

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Willow Park CofE Primary School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 7 and 8 January 2025, 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 require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 2024.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, 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, staff, governors, the local authority and the chief executive officer of the supporting multi-academy trust the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. In particular, I focused on the school's actions to improve the curriculum, including early reading, and the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, looked at samples of work, spoke to pupils, and scrutinised monitoring reports and the school's rapid improvement plan. 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 no longer be judged as requiring special measures.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

**The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.**

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

Since the last inspection, some staff have left. The number of pupils on roll has fallen sharply. The school has restructured into three mixed-age classes. In July 2024, the local authority commissioned the support of LEAF multi-academy trust. It has provided leadership capacity through your role as interim headteacher. Published outcomes for key stage 2 in 2024 were weak. This reflected the inadequacies in the curriculum and pupils' learning over the long term.

Since your arrival, the pace of change in the school has increased. You have re-established the school's vision. This has refocused staff, pupils and governors on the school's core aims. There is a sense of shared purpose to improve the school's quality of education. You have sought to improve staff and pupils' pride in the school. Pupils' work and achievements are now celebrated regularly. All pupils now eat together at lunchtimes. This promotes a sense of community within the school, particularly for the many pupils who join mid-year.

You and your wider team have focused on improving the English and mathematics curriculums first. Phonics is now implemented in line with the expectations of the curriculum. This ensures pupils learn in a consistent and cohesive way. Staff check pupils' understanding more frequently. However, like in the rest of the curriculum, pupils still have significant gaps in their knowledge. Many pupils are receiving extra support to help them address these. Nevertheless, there is still much more to do to help pupils catch up.

The school is starting to develop some of its subjects in the wider curriculum, such as science and history. The school has identified the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn as well as the key vocabulary they should know. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these on pupils' learning.

There are green shoots of success in the implementation of the curriculum. You have established agreed approaches to lesson structures. Pupils recap on their previous learning more regularly. This is helping teachers understand how well pupils are learning over the long term. However, inconsistencies in implementation remain. Some staff need further support in developing their subject knowledge in the concepts they teach. Some teachers do not provide work that helps to meet the aims of the curriculum. This means pupils do not learn as much as they could.

There is now a clearer approach to inducting pupils who arrive at the school mid-year who speak English as an additional language. The school checks quickly what they can do. They are given intensive support for reading. These pupils are learning the phonics code quickly. This is helping them to access other parts of the wider curriculum.

Pupils' behaviour has improved rapidly. This is because the school has raised its expectations of how pupils should behave both in the classroom and on the playground. New routines help pupils manage the transition from social times to the classroom calmly. Pupils rightly say that there is much less low-level disruption in lessons. Pupils now show positive attitudes to learning.

The school's careful strategic planning has been a key factor in the rate of change. The rapid action plan shows the priorities of the school. It is broken down into small steps and checked for its effectiveness regularly. This has helped you and other senior leaders, including governors, to have an accurate view of the school. You are clear there is much more to do. The governing body values the support it has had from the trust. Governors have changed their committee structure to help keep all governors better informed of the school's progress.

Staff feel there is clarity in the direction of the school. Despite the many changes, the school manages their workload well. It is conscious of phasing in new approaches so that staff do not become overwhelmed.

There has been intensive support from the trust. The school has embraced this. It has ensured that there is a focus on sustainable changes rather than relying on quick fixes. It has helped provide a wealth of additional training and coaching for staff. For example, staff have visited other schools to see good practice. External support has also been used to support staff for phonics and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the director of education for the Diocese of Bristol, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Edge  
**His Majesty's Inspector**