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Marie Bradbury
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Dear Mrs Bradbury

Special measures monitoring inspection of St. George's C of E First School

Following my visit with Rachel Davis, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 3 to 4 October 2018, 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 since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures, following the inspection that took place in November 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Worcester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school, including in the early years, and accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that all teachers:
 - immerse pupils in language so that they speedily acquire and apply the spoken and written vocabulary that they need in each subject
 - assess accurately what pupils know and can do
 - plan lessons which systematically build on previous learning
 - provide purposeful learning activities which challenge the most able pupils
 - provide suitable tasks for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they are fully engaged in day-to-day lessons
 - identify errors in pupils' work so that they learn from their mistakes
 - teach pupils of all ages how to present their work neatly, and consistently expect high standards from them.
- Improve leadership at all levels by ensuring that leaders and managers:
 - identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and make sure that appropriate support is provided speedily and effectively
 - track pupils' progress in detail so that those pupils in danger of falling behind are identified and given support
 - share clear and consistent expectations of teachers
 - check, challenge and correct teachers who fail to suitably implement agreed approaches to teaching
 - check for weaknesses in teaching and ensure that staff receive the right guidance, support or challenge.
- Ensure that pupils are supervised during lunchtimes so that quarrels are quickly averted and do not escalate.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Newly qualified teachers should not be appointed to the school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3 to 4 October 2018

Evidence

Inspectors, accompanied by senior leaders, observed pupils' learning in English and mathematics lessons in key stages 1 and 2. Children's learning was also observed in the early years. Inspectors looked at pupils' work in English and mathematics and spoke to pupils about their learning. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons at breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other school leaders, including those who are responsible for special educational needs (SEN), English, mathematics, the early years, physical education (PE), safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. A further meeting was held with two members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with representatives from the local authority and the diocese. Inspectors talked to parents to seek their views.

The inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including the school's analysis of current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance, the school's development plan and safeguarding information. Reports from educational consultants were also scrutinised.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been changes in the staffing structure. Permanent appointments have been made for the leadership of the early years, English and mathematics. A new part-time special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been appointed. Two new teachers have joined the school, one on a temporary basis covering the maternity leave of a permanent member of staff. The chair of governors resigned in June 2018 and a new chair was appointed in July 2018. Pupil numbers have increased slightly.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Strong leadership from the headteacher continues to drive the improvements needed across the school. An effective partnership with the deputy headteacher has been developed. Together, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, take a step-by-step strategic approach, sharing a clear vision for improvement. Senior leaders continue to support other staff to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. They coach and mentor staff to get the best from them. However, leaders are not afraid to have difficult conversations in order to challenge underperformance and hold staff to account.

A longer-term development plan is now in draft form. It rightly focuses on improving outcomes for all pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable or

disadvantaged. It requires some refinement in order to provide greater clarity about the specific improvements needed in each key stage. In its current form, leaders cannot fully evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve outcomes for pupils in different phases of the school.

The recent appointment of several new middle leaders is developing high-quality leadership at all levels. Middle leaders understand their role and demonstrate a secure understanding of their subject areas. They check pupils' work and analyse data to see where gaps exist and improvement is needed. Their action plans focus on the drive for improvement in their specific areas of responsibility. However, it is too early to see the impact of their work. They now need to work closely with senior leaders to drive more rapid improvement, especially in key stage 2.

The newly appointed early years coordinator has a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and areas for development across nursery and reception classes. She is ambitious for the very youngest children, and determined that they get a good start to school. She checks what children can do when they start school and analyses the baseline information thoroughly. Working closely with teachers and support staff, she ensures that children's needs are met through appropriate provision and an engaging learning environment. Children quickly settle to their learning each day because the activities interest them and provide the right amount of challenge. A strong early years team is now in place and, as a result, the early years is a strength of the school.

The leadership of SEN has been strengthened considerably by the appointment of a passionate and knowledgeable coordinator. An improved process for the identification of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is now in place. This is ensuring a more accurate assessment of pupils' needs and a clear evaluation of support already received. Provision is being reviewed so that more appropriate help can be given. Some teachers ensure that immediate support is provided for pupils who struggle. This approach is in its infancy, and leaders are aware of the need to help pupils who have fallen behind to catch up more quickly.

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been far fewer staffing changes. As a result, there is a better understanding of what is expected from all adults, resulting in greater consistency. Positive relationships with and between staff ensure the coaching and mentoring provided by leaders is successful. The staff now rise to the challenge set by leaders and follow their example of high-quality professional conduct.

Senior leaders continue to raise aspirations for the school community. They are ambitious for their pupils and want them to do well. Tracking systems are now established, and they enable leaders to check the progress that pupils make. Vulnerable groups are quickly identified and challenging targets are set for all pupils. However, some staff are still reluctant to accept that higher standards can be reached. As a result, some pupils are not challenged sufficiently. Leaders know

that they have more to do to raise expectations, especially in key stage 2. Further change in the governing body is now resulting in a more concerted effort to hold leaders to account. The new chair of governors, appointed in July 2018, quickly set to work to develop a strategic partnership with the school. Regular meetings with the headteacher enable the chair of governors to develop a secure understanding of the continued challenges facing the school. An annual calendar of governor involvement has been established and a monitoring schedule for governors is in draft form. A new committee has also recently been established to focus on learning and teaching. The chair of governors is clear about the pace of change needed for the school to improve to good.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Due to the more stable staffing situation, the quality of teaching is improving. A committed staff team is developing. A sense of pride is more evident. Classrooms, for the most part, are now well organised and encourage pupils to be independent. Working walls are beginning to be used effectively to support pupils' learning. Appropriate practical equipment is available to develop pupils' understanding. It is used effectively, particularly in mathematics. Leaders make careful checks on what is happening in classrooms. They give useful feedback to teachers to help them develop their skills. The quality of teaching and learning is improving, but it is not yet consistently good across the school.

Assessment is becoming increasingly more accurate. External moderation by the local authority in the summer confirmed the accuracy of assessment in the early years and at the end of Year 2. It was noted that staff had a depth of knowledge and knew their children well. Leaders support staff in other year groups to moderate and check the accuracy of their assessments. As a result, staff confidence to make appropriate judgements against age-related expectations has grown.

However, there are still problems to be addressed. Due to the legacy caused by weak teaching in the past, many pupils in Years 3 and 4 have gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding. Better tracking and more accurate assessment are helping teachers identify where the gaps are, but not all staff are yet skilled in addressing these issues quickly. Some staff do not yet know their pupils well enough to plan work that builds on previous learning. Consequently, some pupils, especially the most able, are not yet challenged sufficiently or moved on quickly enough. Leaders know there is more to be done, particularly in key stage 2, to ensure that work effectively matches pupils' needs.

Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not consistently supported well enough to help them make progress in their learning. Some are too dependent on adult support and do little independently. The new SENCo is working with teachers to put in place a range of 'ordinarily available' teaching and learning approaches in order to meet the needs of most pupils. Extra support and immediate catch up are beginning to be given to those pupils who need it. However, leaders know there is

more to be done to ensure that all pupils are fully engaged in day-to-day lessons.

Language and vocabulary development continues to be a key driver to improving standards across the school. The good progress noted at the last visit has been built on especially in English and mathematics. Many pupils use a wide-ranging vocabulary to express themselves. While the school celebrates home languages and linguistic diversity is valued, English is now seen as the medium for talk. For example, the youngest children communicate confidently with each other in English. Leaders have developed a culture where language is valued and developed by all staff. They know that language and vocabulary now needs developing across a wider range of subjects.

A review of mathematics during the summer term is resulting in better mathematics teaching and a more carefully planned mathematics curriculum. A consistent approach is developing across the school. Teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to use their skills in problem-solving activities. They help pupils develop the ability to prove and explain what they are doing. There are encouraging signs in pupils' books that this is happening more regularly. On occasions misconceptions are not dealt with swiftly and pupils continue to make errors. Not all teachers explain to pupils what they need to do to be successful. A lack of clear steps to success slows learning and limits what pupils can do independently.

The teaching of phonics is now consistently good across the early years and key stage 1. Pupils sound out words with confidence. They use their knowledge of phonics when writing independently. Strong leadership, training for staff and regular checks on pupils' progress are driving up standards in early reading and writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are developing greater confidence, and they demonstrate a keenness to talk about their work. They are acquiring better attitudes to their learning. Many pupils are developing a pride in their work because many adults now have higher expectations of what pupils can do. Presentation in pupils' books is improving. However, this is not yet consistent across the school or within classes, because not all teachers have high enough expectations about the quality of pupils' work. Some teachers allow scruffy work and simple errors to go unchecked.

Leaders continue to take a firm stance on behaviour matters. However, during the monitoring visit, behaviour was not as good as that previously observed. When pupils find the work too easy or too difficult, their attention wanders. Some older pupils mess around when the teacher is not looking. Off-task behaviour during lessons is due to teachers not matching work carefully to pupils' needs.

Behaviour on the playground and at breaktimes was variable during the visit. The majority of pupils know what is expected. They play well together and walk calmly around school. They line up sensibly and display good manners such as opening

doors for others. They use the play equipment appropriately and enjoy the outdoor space. Some older pupils do not show the same self-control. Many were observed playing aggressively and not considering the younger or more vulnerable pupils around them. They misused equipment and apparatus. They barged into and through the dining room until senior leaders asked them to stop. Not all adults are quick to deal with this inappropriate behaviour. Many of the older pupils are not yet good role models for others in the school.

Attendance and punctuality are improving. Leaders work hard to make sure that all pupils attend school regularly and arrive at school on time. They are outside on the gate each morning to meet and greet pupils and families. Absences are followed up through phone calls and home visits. Although some parents still take their children out of school on extended holidays, this is beginning to reduce slowly due to the challenge from leaders. Changes to the time when parents can drop their children off each morning and extended breakfast club hours are helping to improve punctuality. There is now a swift start to the school day, which enables pupils to settle quickly to their learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Since the last monitoring visit, outcomes for pupils across the school have improved. The proportion of pupils reaching age-related expectations has increased in all year groups.

Higher expectations and consistently better teaching in the early years foundation stage resulted in 62% of pupils reaching a good level of development in 2018. This is a rise of 24% compared to the previous year. Evidence in learning journals demonstrates the good progress that children make over time in the nursery and reception classes. As a result, the gap between the attainment of pupils in this phase of the school and national averages is closing quickly.

As a result of a consistent approach in teaching phonics, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 1 rose to 69%, a rise of 21% on the previous year. Pupils continued to make progress in phonics in Year 2. The cumulative percentage reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 2 in 2018 was 88%, compared to 48% the previous year when they were in Year 1.

Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 are improving. In 2018, more pupils reached age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. Teachers have higher expectations, and this is resulting in better progress being made for most pupils.

Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 have some significant gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Although improvements were noted at the end of last year, particularly the strong progress in mathematics, attainment remains low and pupils need more help to catch up.

External support

Regular reviews carried out by the local authority and the diocese continue to identify areas of focus where more rapid action needs to be taken. Two project board meetings have now been held since the school was judged to require special measures. These meetings enable the local authority to hold leaders to account and plan additional support where necessary. An external consultant continues to work with key stage 2 staff to check pupils' work and plan lessons that build on previous learning. The school continues to benefit from a range of external support.