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27 February 2020

Mrs Julie Warburton
Headteacher
St Leonard's Church of England Primary Academy, Blunsdon
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Dear Mrs Warburton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Leonard's Church of England Primary Academy, Blunsdon

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 February 2020, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2019.

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 governors' statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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



Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2019

- Improve the quality of governors' leadership so that:
 - leaders have the capacity and skills to monitor the work of teachers effectively
 - governors support and challenge leaders to bring about the improvements needed
 - pupils' progress improves, especially in key stage 2
 - the spending of public funds is effective so that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make strong progress
 - the curriculum is organised and sequenced so that pupils are receiving a consistent offer of what they need to know
 - leaders ensure that monitoring and accountability are effective in securing rapid progress for pupils.
- Leaders, including governors, must ensure that:
 - they quicken the pace of change
 - monitoring and evaluation are accurate, so that actions have an impact on the main priorities that will improve standards and the quality of education in the school
 - they manage the performance of staff more effectively
 - processes and procedures for gathering information are more efficient and show the progress pupils make from their starting points over time
 - they have a clear and manageable policy for improving behaviour that is understood and accepted by parents, carers, staff and pupils
 - they analyse and tackle the root causes of misbehaviour, so that a few pupils do not continue to display poor conduct.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - middle leaders have the capacity and skills to monitor the work of teachers so that teaching is more consistent
 - teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve and do in every key stage, including Reception
 - the presentation of pupils' work is of a consistently high standard
 - the most able pupils in all year groups, including those who are disadvantaged, are provided with learning that is sufficiently challenging and deepens their thinking

- pupils with lower ability are given sufficient structure and support to make better progress over time.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 February 2020 to 13 February 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other staff, pupils, members of the governing body and the school improvement partner from the Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT). The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a parent. During the two days, the inspector spent time in classrooms observing pupils' behaviour and learning.

Context

Significant changes have taken place at senior leadership level following the school's previous inspection in March 2019. The headteacher and deputy headteacher both left at the end of the summer term 2019. In September 2019, the current headteacher and another senior leader from a local school carried out the role of joint interim headteachers. The current headteacher was appointed as the substantive headteacher in January 2020. Two newly qualified teachers joined the teaching staff in September 2019.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The headteacher has stabilised the school and raised expectations of staff since her arrival. Staff receive clear direction from the headteacher and know what is expected of them. Even though the headteacher has only been at the school a relatively short period of time, discussions with staff show that they are motivated and feel empowered to bring about the significant improvements needed at St Leonard's.

The previous inspection report commented of pupils' behaviour, 'A significant minority of pupils show a lack of respect for each other and staff when in lessons.' This is no longer the case. Classrooms are now a place where pupils behave very well as a result of the changes made in the approach to managing behaviour. Staff and pupils commented that behaviour has improved and, during both days of the inspection, no poor behaviour was observed. Pupils are far more engaged with their teachers and enjoy learning. Pupils work well in classrooms on their own and with each other. They are pleasant, polite, welcoming and proud of their school.

There has been a big focus on developing pupils' reading to raise standards across the school. Each class now reads a book together regularly and pupils show a real enjoyment of this. Pupils were able to explain knowledgeably the book they were reading and showed a strong understanding of the key ideas. For example, pupils told the inspector about a person having 'telekinetic' superpowers in their book. When asked what this word meant, they were able to explain the meaning very

clearly. Pupils who spoke to the inspector told him that the renewed focus on reading had encouraged them to read more on their own at home. Future plans are to develop the library so that pupils read books suitable to their reading level and to help to develop their reading further. Staff will also receive training on effective phonics teaching. This is intended to help staff understand fully how early reading is taught to pupils and also help them to offer more effective support to pupils that may be weaker readers.

Some initial work has taken place to improve the curriculum that pupils are offered. Teachers have cross-referenced the content of what the school offers with the national curriculum. This revealed significant shortcomings in the school's curriculum offer. Plans are now in place to implement a more challenging curriculum across the school.

The current curriculum is not implemented well enough by teachers. Teachers do not plan sequences of learning which incrementally build upon pupils' prior knowledge. Also, teachers do not ensure that pupils understand fully key concepts and ideas. As a result, pupils do not learn more within each subject as they cannot remember previous learning well enough. Teachers do not assess pupils' level of understanding accurately enough. When pupils have misconceptions, these are not identified and rectified by teachers. Pupils, therefore, continue to make errors. Basic punctuation and expectations on neatness of presentation are not sufficiently reinforced by teachers.

You and your governors are overseeing the transition to join DBAT. The formal move to DBAT should be completed in the near future.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher leads by example at the school. She has very high expectations and communicates a real determination to ensure that the school improves and quickly. The headteacher is under no illusion about the enormity of the task ahead, but she knows the urgent priorities for improvement and has started work on these. The staff team welcome the headteacher's approach, which provides them with much needed confidence. The staff are far more open now and regularly discuss their approaches to teaching. Visits to other schools have provided staff with opportunities to observe how other schools operate and to see effective classroom practice.

Governors have taken a considered look at their effectiveness since the previous inspection. The governing body has been strengthened through the addition of governors with a significant amount of educational background experience. During discussions with the inspector, governors articulated an accurate understanding of the school's current position and its priorities for development. Governors ensure that they receive the information from the headteacher that they need. They are beginning to be able to support and challenge the headteacher more effectively.

The headteacher has worked through numerous school improvement plans and recovery plans since beginning as headteacher. The plan currently being written identifies correctly the key areas to be developed next. The plan sets out key actions and regular monitoring. It does not, however, have specific enough intended impact statements to make sure that key actions bring about sufficient improvement.

The headteacher works well alongside the school improvement partner that has been deployed by DBAT. Through joint observations of teaching and scrutiny of the school's work, they both articulate an accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness to date. This joint working will be crucial going forward to ensure that the school continues on its improvement journey.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher has brought strong leadership to the school as headteacher. She knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well.
- Pupils' behaviour is much improved. They enjoy coming to school and engage very well with their learning.
- Much work has been done to ensure that classrooms and the school environment are tidy. Walls exhibit pupils' work and classroom walls are used to support pupils' learning with key information and to reinforce positive behaviour expectations.
- The outdoor area for the Reception class has been extensively developed. Many more learning opportunities exist now for children in this outdoor area.
- A few subject leaders are beginning to think more carefully about the key learning pupils need in their subject and how to sequence this learning so that pupils remember more. This is particularly so in history and mathematics.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- While there are moves to improve the curriculum, it remains the key weakness in the school. Too many subjects do not consider the key learning pupils need. Learning is not sequenced so that pupils can build on what they know and can do. Pupils do not remember key learning over time.
- Leadership in the school needs further development. While the headteacher provides strong leadership, there is too little other leadership in the school on a day-to-day basis.
- Much more work needs to be done to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils that need more support in their learning. Some work has begun to understand the specific needs of SEND pupils. However, teachers do not yet provide effective support for them in the classroom.

Adaptations made by teachers for less able pupils often focus on ensuring that pupils 'do' something but lacks attention to what pupils need to learn.

External support

Much external support for the school has been accessed which has been effective in helping the school to commence its improvement journey. Specialist leaders of education have provided helpful support in English and mathematics and further support is planned. Other effective support has come through Swindon local authority, other primary schools and DBAT.