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5 June 2019

Mrs Claire Bunting  
Headteacher  
Mount Charles School  
Morven Road  
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Cornwall  
PL25 4PP

Dear Mrs Bunting

### **Short inspection of Mount Charles School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 May 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2016, you have prioritised establishing consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. You have successfully embedded new approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics to help you bring about consistency which has resulted in improvements to pupils' progress. You have placed reading at the heart of the school's curriculum, identifying its importance so pupils have access to the breadth of the subjects on offer.

To support you in your work, you recently appointed two assistant headteachers. Together, you form an effective team with high expectations at your core. You play a vital role in monitoring the quality of education across the school and securing improvements in pupils' progress. As a leadership team, you have an accurate evaluation of the school's performance and have high expectations for all pupils. You carry out careful analysis of what pupils know, can do and understand and use this to inform your improvement priorities. You have established a clear vision for the school, underpinned by a 'no excuses' culture. You are adamant that pupils have, at least, a good quality of education.

The trust has delegated powers of overseeing safeguarding and education standards to the local governing body. Governors have a strong understanding of the school's performance. They request detailed reports from the leadership team, which includes information about what pupils know, can do and understand and the

quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Governors ask suitably challenging questions of leaders about this information.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that staff have the necessary training to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. They are aware of both national and local safeguarding risks, such as county lines and supporting victims of domestic violence, and share these with staff. Staff are vigilant when recognising concerns about pupils' welfare. They record these concerns well and in an organised way to form a useful, insightful chronology of key events in a child's life. Leaders take proportionate action based on these concerns including, where necessary, escalating concerns to the local authority. Where families require help, the pastoral leader is available to signpost families to the most appropriate support and guidance. This has also proved valuable in reducing pupils' absence rates. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved and fewer pupils frequently miss school.

Leaders and governors have an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding. They completed a self-audit tool and are already acting on aspects that required improvement. Leaders conduct appropriate recruitment checks on adults who wish to work at the school. These checks ensure that leaders only appoint staff who are suitable to work with children. During the inspection, the single central record, which leaders use to record recruitment information, needed to be amended to ensure that it contained all that it should.

### **Inspection findings**

- First, I considered how well teaching, learning and assessment equips children with the necessary phonic knowledge, so they can be successful readers from a young age. Historically, pupils have attained well in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. However, there was a dip in the school's performance in 2018. In addition, the proportion of children achieving the early learning goal in reading at the end of the Reception Year has declined over the previous four years.
- Pupils read books which match the sounds they have practised in class. Phonics teaching is well matched to their emerging needs. There is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics, expectations are clear, and adults use time effectively in lessons. However, on occasions, when staff ask pupils to independently practise sounds they have learned, they do not routinely check on pupils' progress to ensure that they are on track.
- Leaders use monitoring effectively to keep a close eye on how well phonics is taught and to check on pupils' rates of progress. Monitoring is precise and captures accurately the quality of phonics teaching. Children in the early years make strong progress, with most working at the expected stage of the school's phonics programme. Most pupils in key stage 1 also make strong progress. Pupils who were previously working below expectations for their age in reading at the end of Reception have either met the phonics screening check or are well on track to do so. However, leaders acknowledge that a small number of pupils are

not currently making the required progress to catch up. Leaders have identified where further training is needed to ensure greater consistency in teaching phonics, particularly for lower-attaining pupils.

- Secondly, I considered how well the pupil premium strategy supports disadvantaged pupils to make strong progress in mathematics. Over time, pupils' progress has been variable. This has resulted in an attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. The school's pupil premium strategy from the 2017/2018 academic year shows significant gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, it also shows a gradual closing of this gap as pupils move through the school. The gap in mathematics is closing at a slower rate than seen in reading and writing.
- Leaders have implemented a new approach to teaching mathematics. They recognised that there was an inconsistent approach across the school and took steps to rectify this. Leaders' intentions are that pupils secure strong mathematical fluency to help them solve related problems. The new approach includes providing pupils with text books to fulfil the mathematics curriculum. It is the intended approach that teachers will provide pupils with supplementary opportunities to deepen their understanding through reasoning and problem-solving. While teachers are providing pupils with these additional opportunities, it mainly consists of further fluency teaching. This prevents pupils applying what they already know. School leaders are well-placed to amend and evolve this new mathematical approach, now that pupils' fluency knowledge is secure across the school.
- Current disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in mathematics, showing significant improvements from previous academic years. However, gaps in attainment remain, particularly in upper key stage 2. Pupils will need to make continued progress if the attainment gap in mathematics is to close.
- Finally, I considered how leaders support pupils' reading in key stage 2. Historically, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 has been inconsistent. However, in 2018 the proportion of pupils working at the standard expected for their age and the higher standard was above the national average. School leaders have taken actions to avoid future inconsistencies, aiming to promote a love of reading across the school, underpinned by a rigorous reading programme.
- Leaders have implemented a reading programme across key stage 2 which helps ensure that pupils read books that are well-matched to their reading capabilities. Pupils are positive about this approach. They talk enthusiastically about the joy of reading a new book and they like to have access to the rich book stock available to them. They read frequently at school and value these opportunities. Books are accessible and suitably challenging. Pupils who are still following the phonic programme have access to books within their phonic capabilities, so they can practise the sounds they have been learning. When they have finished a book, pupils complete a quiz to test their knowledge. Pupils savour these opportunities and perform well during these quizzes.
- School leaders have implemented an additional opportunity to provide pupils with a variety of questions about the books they have read. Pupils understand what they have read, reading at a suitable pace which allows them to take in key

events and details. In lessons, pupils demonstrate an enthusiasm for reading. They are positive about the school's reading scheme and enjoy selecting books based on their reading ability. Pupils read widely and often, selecting both fiction and non-fiction. However, in lessons there are times where adults do not recognise when lower-attaining pupils struggle to comprehend what they have read or become disengaged from reading.

- School leaders' actions to improve reading progress across the school are paying off. Pupils make strong progress from their starting points and demonstrate a love of reading.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- lower-attaining pupils catch up with their peers in understanding phonics, so a greater proportion reach the standard expected in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1
- disadvantaged pupils make continued strong progress in mathematics, applying their fluency knowledge to successfully reason and problem-solve so an increased proportion are working at expectations for their age and the higher standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I conducted all activities alongside either the headteacher or the assistant headteachers. At the beginning of the inspection, I met with leaders to discuss school improvement priorities and their evaluation of the school's performance. We then made visits to lessons. I met with the subject leaders for phonics and reading to discuss their actions and consider school leaders' information about pupils' progress. I met with leaders to scrutinise pupils' mathematics books and with a range of pupils from key stage 2 to discuss their reading experiences.

I also met with the designated leader and deputy designated leader for safeguarding and five representatives from the governing body. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including the record of concerns about pupils' well-being.

I took account of 42 responses to the online survey, Parent View, the 13 responses to the staff survey and 62 responses to the pupil survey.