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Mr Luke Rees
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rees

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Bugle School

Following my visit to your school on 8–9 January 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - adapting and strengthening the curriculum so that it more consistently meets the needs of pupils and properly prepares them for the next stage of their education
 - implementing rigorous and effective systems for managing staff performance so that teaching improves more rapidly
 - establishing clear expectations for middle leaders so that they all have impact on their areas of responsibility.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it consistently meets the needs of pupils by:
 - raising teachers' expectations for pupils of all abilities so that pupils communicate, read, write and apply mathematics at age-appropriate levels
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment effectively to plan work that helps pupils to build on what they already know and can do
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics
 - making sure that teaching consistently results in good progress for all groups of pupils.
- Further improve pupils' attendance by tackling persistent absence.
- Improve the quality of the early years foundation stage by:
 - securing effective leadership for the whole of the early years
 - ensuring consistency in the quality of learning experiences in indoor and outdoor learning spaces.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8–9 January 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and pupils from the school council. The inspector met with the chair of trustees of the Aspire MAT and one member of the trust's St Austell hub. A meeting was held with the CEO of the trust, the strategic partner for the school and the trust's early years adviser.

The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions being taken by leaders and managers towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Context

The previous section 5 inspection took place in May 2019. The headteacher left the school in October 2019. A senior leader, who had joined the school shortly before the inspection, became acting headteacher in November 2019. Throughout this period, advisers from the Aspire MAT provided significant support for the school.

The nursery manager left the school in July 2019. Two other teachers left in the autumn term. The school has recruited staff to replace those who have left, including a new senior leader and a manager for the nursery. A newly restructured senior leadership team began its work at the beginning of January 2020.

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

The acting headteacher has introduced a new curriculum in mathematics. He has high expectations for its implementation. This includes a new calculation policy that sets out these high expectations of teachers' practice. However, the policy is not yet followed consistently by all staff.

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' success in early reading was limited because phonics teaching was not regular or coherently planned. Senior leaders introduced a new phonics teaching programme in September 2019. They have provided staff with the necessary resources and training to successfully implement the programme. Pupils' reading books closely match their phonics knowledge. As a result, Reception and Year 1 pupils' ability to read unfamiliar words is growing and so they are becoming more confident readers.

Teachers' efforts to develop older pupils' reading ability have had some success. Teachers now read to their classes each day and many pupils enjoy this. Nevertheless, pupils are not yet enthusiastic about selecting and reading books.

Pupils' skills in writing remain weak. Many pupils' ability to form letters is not well developed from an early age. Consequently, their handwriting is poor. Teachers are now placing more emphasis on helping pupils to master basic writing techniques but this has only recently begun.

Senior leaders are aware that the curriculum is not broad enough. It has too little emphasis on creative and artistic subjects and pupils are not learning a foreign language in key stage 2. Pupils do not receive a rich and broad experience of learning and so their knowledge is limited when they leave.

In the past, teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment were not sufficiently reliable. Better curriculum planning in English and mathematics has brought a more reliable assessment process. Moderation of teachers' judgements with other schools is contributing to this improved reliability.

Pupils appreciate the extra-curricular activities that the school offers, particularly in sports such as cross-country running and football. Pupils told the inspector that they like the trips that teachers organise for them. For example, pupils in Year 4 particularly enjoyed the recent visit to a local museum's ancient Egyptians exhibition.

The school has worked closely with an education welfare officer to improve the systems used to monitor pupils' attendance. Teachers are now taking more responsibility for the attendance of pupils in their classes. The rate of pupils' attendance is higher this year than it was last year. Nevertheless, while improving, attendance remains below average.

Pastoral support staff are communicating well with parents and carers, particularly with some groups of parents from minority ethnic groups such as the Portuguese and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Pupils from these communities are now attending more regularly than in the past. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced significantly this year but is still well above the national average.

Most pupils have good relationships with their teachers. They follow instructions and routines well. This leads to a purposeful atmosphere in classrooms that allows pupils to focus on their work.

The Piccolo nursery manager left in July 2019. Senior leaders were not able to recruit a suitable replacement ready for September. This led to a disrupted start to the year for the nursery children and uncertainty about the future for their families.

New leadership of the Piccolo nursery from November 2019 has brought stability and certainty. The two-year-old provision has been moved into the same area of the school as the three- and four-year-old provision. The new nursery manager has particular expertise in developing children's communication skills. Nursery staff are

beginning to spend more time speaking with the children as they play and learn. Even so, they need further training to improve their skills in promoting children's speech and language development.

Staff absence led to children in the Reception class having an unsettled start to the year. Since October 2019, new staff have joined the Reception class. Children have been taught routines for working together and they have been given clear expectations about behaviour. As a result, the Reception class is an environment where children can learn.

The trust has invested in new equipment for both the indoor and outdoor area. Advice from the trust's early years leader has led to the outdoor environment being reduced in size but improved in quality. Because children are more closely grouped together, teachers and teaching assistants have more opportunity to talk to children and model good language skills when they are outside.

A growing number of children who speak English as an additional language are joining the school. Teaching assistants' ability to help these pupils is not yet developed well enough to meet these children's needs.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

The school has appointed a new senior leader with the necessary skills and experience to lead the English curriculum area. This senior leader started work in the school two days before the monitoring inspection. Her appointment has strengthened the leadership team in this priority area of the school's work.

Leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. Teachers understand these pupils' needs because individual education plans are produced for pupils and distributed to those staff who need them.

A large proportion of pupils at the school are disadvantaged. While the school has published a strategy for using additional funding for these pupils, it is not precisely costed. The strategy is not sufficiently well understood by those with responsibility for governance and so it is difficult for them to evaluate its impact on this group of pupils. Senior leaders intend to designate a member of staff as a pupil premium champion and so better define the responsibility for implementing their strategy for supporting these pupils. However, this has not yet happened.

The trust's strategic partner has helped the school to recruit a new senior leader and reallocate other leadership roles. As a result, the school is starting this year with a new senior leadership team. Senior leaders have clearly defined responsibilities that relate directly to the priorities in the school's plan for improvement. Staff, including middle leaders, are more accountable for their work. This clarity of purpose is beginning to improve staff morale and restore their hope for the future.

The trust's early years adviser has helped the Nursery and Reception class to overcome turbulence in staffing in the autumn term. Throughout the term, she supported the existing staff in these areas and advised the school about necessary changes to the provision. From November 2019, she has guided the new nursery manager and the new Reception teacher, enabling them to become successfully established in their roles.

The chair of the trust board recognises that the poor performance of this school was not identified quickly enough in the past. However, following a period of rapid growth, the trust now has more effective systems for the governance of its schools. The trust's training for hub councillors is ongoing. For example, it is helping councillors to develop a greater understanding of school performance information so that they are better placed to support and challenge senior leaders.

Since May 2019, the leadership of the school has changed a great deal. Some improvements to the quality of education have been made since then, but many weaknesses remain. Nevertheless, the establishment of a functioning leadership team represents substantial progress for the school. The school now has a firm foundation to build on for the future.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust's school improvement advisers have played a critical role in supporting the school through a difficult period. The strategic partner from the trust provides regular, astute advice to the acting headteacher. Consequently, the leadership of the school has remained effective through a period of greatly reduced capacity in the autumn term.
- The trust's support for the early years team, through their early years adviser, has helped the school maintain stability in the Reception class and so retain parents' confidence.
- The school has developed a strong focus on early reading since the previous inspection. This has led to the introduction of a new phonics teaching programme and other initiatives that are beginning to help pupils read more confidently.
- Senior leaders' work to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has been a strength. Their actions, with partners, to improve communication with parents has been effective, particularly with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust was slow to recognise the decline in the effectiveness of the school prior to the previous inspection. Some areas of the school's work, such as the curriculum, had been neglected for too long. Senior leaders are bringing about improvements in English and mathematics. However, only limited action has yet

been taken to develop the wider curriculum, including science, history and creative subjects.

- Senior leaders' plans for the use of pupil premium funding are not sufficiently detailed. They recognise the need for accountability. However, they have not yet established a suitably costed strategy that is understood by staff across the school.

External support

The great majority of support for school improvement is provided from within the trust and is effective. Some additional support is provided in English and mathematics through local networks sponsored by the Department for Education.

The school is receiving support from the Kernow English Hub to develop Reception children's and Year 1 pupils' reading and language skills. An adviser from the hub reviewed the school's work in November 2019 and provided guidance for senior leaders about the implementation of a new phonics teaching programme. This has led to improvements in the way phonics is taught at the school.

The acting headteacher has played a pivotal role in the introduction of a new mathematics curriculum. He has received information and support from the Cornwall and West Devon mathematics hub. This has shaped teachers' training to enhance their mathematics subject knowledge.