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Mr Matthew Barge  
Principal  
Motcombe CofE VA Primary School  
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Dear Mr Barge

### **Short inspection of Motcombe CofE VA Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 2017, 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 December 2011.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The proportions of pupils at the end of key stage 2 reaching and exceeding the standards expected for their age in mathematics, reading, and spelling, punctuation and grammar, are well above the national average.

The school joined the Southern Academy Trust in March 2015. Until recently the trust's arrangements to review the quality of education at the school have lacked precision and challenge to drive forward rapid improvement. This has been exacerbated by changes in leadership at the school in the last year. As a result, current pupils make typically good progress overall. This has resulted in some slippage in pupils' performance in writing. Consequently, pupils' achievement in writing is in line with the national average and too few current pupils exceed the standard of work that is expected for their age.

You have worked at pace to take stock of the many strengths at the school along with the aspects that require further work. You have taken decisive action to remedy some of the weaknesses that occurred as a result of staff changes. Along with the assistant principal, you have strengthened leadership systems and have improved the daily running of the school. For example, more precise teachers' assessments in English and mathematics ensure that most teachers are using all the information they have about what pupils know, can do, and understand to

strengthen quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress even further. You are accurate in your evaluation that the quality of teaching is typically good overall.

The school is undergoing rapid expansion. The trust has facilitated moving to a seven-class structure. Consequently, many more pupils enter the school mid-year than is typical. Precise on-entry assessments ensure that pupils receive learning that meets their needs. These pupils settle quickly, and those who entered the school with gaps in their learning, or have been previously lower-attaining are catching up quickly.

Such rapid change at Motcombe has brought about some anxiety from the parent body. For example, a few parents commented that when concerns are raised they are not followed up quickly enough by leaders or the trust. Conversely, nearly every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school and agrees that their child is taught well and is making good progress. You know that at this time of transition, leaders, including the trust, need to do more to fully secure parental satisfaction as the school continues to grow.

When the school opened in 2015 there was a wide difference between pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics. Pupils did consistently well in reading but pupils' outcomes in mathematics were below the national average. Your assistant principal reworked the school's curriculum and provided a comprehensive package of staff training. As a result, staff subject knowledge is now good and pupils receive the level of challenge in mathematics that they should.

Leaders' whole-school strategy to deepen pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts, to improve their aptitude to solve problems and reason in mathematics is effective. Previously identified weaknesses have been remedied successfully. Pupils across the school now make strong progress in mathematics. As a result, pupils' outcomes in mathematics have improved markedly. Every pupil in 2017 reached the standards expected for their age in the end of key stage 2 assessments and the proportion of pupils exceeding this standard was also above the national average.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies, procedures and training relating to safeguarding meet requirements and are up to date. The trust's recruitment checks of new staff are in line with national requirements to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children.

You have tightened the school's record-keeping systems. You have increased the number of staff who are trained as designated safeguarding leaders. You follow up any concerns raised with timely intervention and active engagement with multi-agency support. You have ensured that staff know how to use and apply their safeguarding training within their daily routines and work to minimise pupils' risk of harm. Pupils say that they feel safe and adults listen and help them sort out any problems quickly.

The local governing board takes its safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. It ensures that any actions from the local authority annual safeguarding audit are tackled quickly and makes regular checks on the culture of safeguarding by speaking with staff and pupils. For example, there have been recent checks on staff's understanding of child exploitation and pupils' understanding of how to keep safe on the internet.

## **Inspection findings**

- A key line of enquiry to ascertain that the school remained good was to establish the effectiveness of the teaching of writing. This is because pupils do not meet the same high standard in writing as they do in mathematics and reading.
- The teaching of writing is good overall. Leaders have recently revamped the writing curriculum. This has been successful in providing wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in other curriculum areas. Pupils are motivated and keen to write for a range of audiences and purposes. Most teachers insist that pupils routinely edit and improve their work. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to apply their skills to write with greater complexity and depth. However, teaching over time has not been sufficiently challenging for some current pupils. Too few previously middle-attaining pupils in key stage 2 make rapid progress and exceed the standards expected for their age.
- In key stage 1, most pupils write with growing stamina and with an increased level of accuracy and detail. However, leaders' checks on how well pupils apply their phonics and spelling to their writing books are not yet as precise as they could be. As a result, a small minority of low-attaining and middle-attaining pupils in Year 1 do not make the progress they should. You know that this aspect remains a key aspect for development.
- Another aspect we examined was the impact of teaching in the early years. Across a three-year period outcomes in Reception have been good. In 2016, children's outcomes were exceptionally high. However, in 2017 the proportion of children meeting a good level of development, the standard expected at the end of Reception Year, dipped to just above the national average.
- Teaching in the early years is securely good. Teachers' assessments in all areas of learning are precise and used to good effect so that teaching builds on what children already know, can do and understand. The teaching of phonics and early reading and writing is particularly strong. Adults have consistently high expectations of children both in adult-led sessions and when children are applying their phonics understanding independently. Writing activities are all carefully planned to encompass current phonics teaching. As a result, children in the early years are interested to learn, display high levels of concentration for their age, and make consistently good and often rapid progress from their different starting points. Children are well prepared for Year 1. However, leaders and teachers do not use all the information they have to support transition in the first term of Year 1. As a result, progress has stalled for a few middle-attaining and low-attaining pupils this term.
- We also examined the progress of girls in mathematics in Year 4. This is because

some previously middle-attaining girls failed to meet the expected standards when they were in Year 2. Most of these pupils have caught up. Girls and boys tackle mathematical challenges with equal confidence. The school's strategy to teach mathematics provides plenty of opportunity to practise and consolidate new skills before moving on. Pupils are routinely expected to explain their thinking and workings out. This ensures that pupils gain a firm understanding of the mathematical concepts taught.

- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders, including the trust and local governing board, are driving improvement so that pupils' achievement and attendance continues to rise as the school increases in size. You are working determinedly on the right aspects for improvement. Staff confirm that your strong-minded leadership is bringing a level of rigour and drive to the school that was previously lacking. You recognise that the school has embedded systems and structures in place to check how well the school is performing. However, you are strengthening these even further so that teachers become even more accountable for improving pupils' progress. You accurately identify that leaders' checks on teaching and pupils' progress could be refined even further so they take into account pupils' starting points. You monitor pupils' attendance closely. As a result, pupils' attendance, including for those who are disadvantaged, has risen and is above the national average.
- The local governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Increasingly they ask challenging questions of school leaders, and gather information for themselves to test out the impact of leaders' actions. However, there is not sufficient clarity about whether the trust or school leaders are responsible for some operational roles, such as checking risk assessments of the school site. As a result, this makes it difficult for the local governing board to fulfil all aspects of their duties as effectively as they could.
- Until recently, the trust has not secured a comprehensive school improvement function for this school; external evaluations have been overly generous of the school's performance. The trust's strategic planning systems are not yet as challenging or robust as they need to be to hold school leaders to account. More recently, the trust has sharpened its training for local board members and directors responsible for key functions, such as teaching and learning, and behaviour and safeguarding. This is bringing about greater clarity to roles and responsibilities so that the acceleration of improvement continues.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' transition from the early years foundation stage to Year 1 is highly effective and leaders' checks on pupils' application of phonics in their writing ensures that middle-attaining and low-attaining pupils do not fall behind on entry to Year 1
- teachers have uniformly high expectations of what pupils can achieve in their writing so that a greater proportion of middle-attaining pupils across the school

meet and exceed the standards expected for their age

- the trust's leadership systems to hold the school to account are strengthened so that its monitoring and analysis of school performance is rigorous
- site safety checks and site risk assessments are comprehensive and regular.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I spoke with you, senior and middle leaders, and representatives from the local governing board. I also met with the chief executive officer who has been responsible for fulfilling the school improvement function within the trust.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I looked at pupils' workbooks with the assistant principal and English leader. I also talked to pupils in lessons and at playtime and listened to their views of the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans, and school performance information. I also looked at monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment, your analysis of pupils' attendance, and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 49 responses to the Parent View online survey, and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through the online questionnaire and through discussions during the inspection.