

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
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2 March 2022

Vicky Prior  
Headteacher  
Portesham Church of England Primary School  
Winters Close  
Portesham  
Weymouth  
Dorset  
DT3 4HP

Dear Ms Prior

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Portesham Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 January 2022, 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 most 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 May 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

**The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.**

**The school's action plans are fit for purpose.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, 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 reports website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 January 2022 and 26 January 2022**

### **Context**

Staff and pupil absence due to COVID-19 has been high. Some work to improve the wider curriculum is less far forward as a result.

Meetings with the governing body have continued throughout. However, COVID-19 restrictions have minimised face-to-face visits to the school. Since the previous inspection, four additional governors were co-opted to bolster the leadership of the governing body. In December 2021, five members of the governing body resigned, including the chair. The full governing body was disbanded shortly afterwards. An interim executive board (IEB) is now in place.

The school has received additional support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Some activities have needed to be remote. A small amount of planned staff professional development has been cancelled due to school closure as a result of COVID-19.

There are regular meetings with the local authority (LA) leaders. Talk around the school (TAS) meetings are held by the LA to hold leaders, including those responsible for governance, to account for carrying out the agreed actions in the school's development plans. The school is still very dependent on additional support.

There have been no notable staff changes.

This inspection focused on leaders' action planning and their work to improve the curriculum, with a particular focus on reading.

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

There is much activity under way to improve the quality of education. Leaders are making sure that the tasks outlined in the school's action plan to address the fundamental weaknesses identified at the previous inspection are being implemented. Leaders are working to specific targets to bring about improvement. Additional training is supporting teaching staff to improve their subject knowledge and capacity to be subject leaders. The staff are responding well. Improvements to the quality of education pupils receive are beginning to emerge as a result. This is most evident in English and mathematics.

There is now an early years manager who has oversight of the curriculum across the full early years age range. A precisely focused action plan sets out the direction for immediate changes. The first phase of this action plan is nearing completion. Changes to the curriculum this year are providing the youngest children and those in Reception with a sharp focus on early language and communication, early number work and gaining a love of reading. A broad curriculum is currently being built. However, some activities do not allow children to get enough practice to consolidate new learning.

Children in Reception are soaking up new knowledge quickly and relishing learning to read simple words and sentences for the first time. Children who need extra help are now receiving more tailored support. Children are happy, safe and cared for well. Nonetheless, leaders are not yet addressing some basic things. For example, senior leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the impact of curriculum development in the early years yet.

Reading has a much higher priority in every school day now. All staff have received training in phonics. There is now a consistent approach to teaching pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Staff are teaching to the requirements set out in the key stage 1 national curriculum. New resources ensure that the books pupils read are matched to the sounds that pupils know already. This is increasing many pupils' fluency and accuracy week by week. However, some teaching does not yet meet pupils' needs well enough, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

In key stage 2, there are many more opportunities to read and explore texts, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Staff are following leaders' instructions to implement a new reading strategy. However, senior leaders' expectations remain too low. Senior leaders do not expect there to be sufficient emphasis on the most demanding content that is set out in the national curriculum. When teaching does meet this higher expectation in Years 5 and 6, these pupils rise to this higher expectation commendably. However, the coverage of such content is piecemeal across key stage 2. Leaders have not compared their new reading strategy in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 against the ambition set out in the national curriculum. So, while pupils are reading more, some still underachieve. Leaders are getting to grips with assuring themselves that the actions relating to reading on the school improvement plan are being completed. However, they are not yet focusing enough on measuring impact.

The IEB members have proven track records in turning school governance around. They understand their roles and responsibilities well. They understand why and how fundamental weaknesses in leadership occur and how to tackle them head on. The IEB is transparent in its plans to strengthen leadership accountability. Nonetheless, this work is still at an early stage and too soon to see a clear impact.

There has been much support for teachers to develop sequences of work in English and mathematics. Units of work are now showing more progression across terms and years. However, activity choices within sequences of work do not consistently build on what has come before. When some pupils in Years 1 to 4 finish their work before others, there is too little direction about what to do next. This still hinders a minority of pupils' progress. School leaders are not providing staff with the precise feedback they need to develop their teaching and assessment practices.

Work is under way to develop the curriculum in other subjects. Leaders' actions are starting to bring about some green shoots of improvement. The curriculum for most subjects outlines what will be taught and when. Staff deliver the curriculum that leaders ask them to. However, the curriculum is not shaped well enough to make amends for

pupils' considerable underachievement in the past. Pupils still have some fundamental gaps in knowledge, for example in science and geography. This means that pupils are not catching up swiftly.

Staff are carrying out every task on their subject and whole-school action plans in a timely way. The English, mathematics and early years curriculums are all going in the right direction. However, some basic operational processes and systems the IEB expect to be in place are not sufficiently robust. Pupils are safe. Staff are proactive in identifying pupils' needs. They follow the procedures for reporting concerns that are set out in the safeguarding policies and guidance. However, senior leaders do not always apply the same approach to their safeguarding work. Important safeguarding records are disorganised and are not subject to regular review.

Parents and carers have a mixed view of how well leaders are communicating with them. Some parents feel that staff keep them expertly informed of how well their children are doing, whereas others remain dissatisfied.

While the quality of education is starting to improve, weak leadership decisions are still taking place. The school is not operating as well as it should. Some basic and fundamental problems have not been identified or challenged. For example, staff cannot deliver an ambitious physical education (PE) curriculum because over one third of the school hall is not usable. The hall is cluttered with resources. Senior leaders do not work through some policy decisions sensibly. For instance, while staff make every effort to follow the school's intimate care policy in the early years, a lack of organised space for nappy changing means that staff provide their careful and sensitive intimate care in an open space amidst learning resources. The IEB has plans to put these things right so that all pupils get the access to the full curriculum and care they deserve.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- The IEB needs to assure itself that the operational leadership systems improve with haste. Record-keeping and senior leaders' response to safeguarding concerns need to improve quickly.
- The IEB needs to assure itself that any curriculum narrowing caused by poor decision-making and inappropriate storage of resources in the hall is eliminated so that all pupils get equal access to a suitable PE curriculum.

### **Additional support**

Teachers welcome and value the wealth of additional support they are receiving. This includes working with representatives from the LA, staff from English and mathematics hubs, national leaders of education and other experts in teaching pupils to read. Teachers are using this wide-ranging support to develop their subject knowledge and bring about improvements to teaching and the curriculum increasingly well.

Leaders use TAS meetings to discuss the implementation of their work. The IEB is working closely with the LA to review the impact of leaders' actions to date. Leaders have been using additional support to learn how to write action plans and carry out basic checks on whether actions are implemented. Leaders are using the additional support to assist them in planning for next steps. Nonetheless, training to increase senior leaders' capacity to lead school-wide improvement with increased independence is still at a very early stage. The school is still very dependent on additional support.

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other school staff, three members of the IEB and three representatives of Dorset local authority. The inspector reviewed pupils' work and talked with a group of pupils to seek their views.