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Dear Mrs Pemberton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Accrington Benjamin Hargreaves Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 22 and 23 May 2024, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents and carers any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other leaders, governors, representatives of the diocese and the local authority the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also met with representatives of the multi-academy trust that the school intends to join. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also spoke with staff, pupils and parents. I visited lessons and reviewed pupils' work. I also reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

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

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Following the previous inspection, the substantive headteacher left the school and an interim headteacher was appointed. A number of teachers also left the school. They have mostly been replaced by temporary teachers on long-term contracts. In recent weeks, the governing body has been restructured and a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have been appointed. The school is in the process of joining a multi-academy trust.

The school has set about tackling the deep-rooted weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in a logical order. This work is underpinned by a well-thought-out improvement plan. The most pressing issues, such as keeping pupils safe, have received due attention. This has led to marked improvements in some aspects of the school's provision. Even so, the road to recovery has not been smooth or easy. The school has faced numerous stumbling blocks along the way, which at times have slowed its progress towards ensuring that pupils benefit from an acceptable standard of education. Although many of these obstacles remain, the school is finding suitable solutions to overcome the barriers that have hindered the impact of its work. As a result, the necessary foundations are in place to help the school on the next stage of its improvement journey.

The school's work to ensure that pupils are protected from harm has been successful. Consequently, safeguarding is now effective. Training for staff, and the well-understood procedures for reporting concerns, mean that pupils at risk of harm are spotted quickly and supported appropriately. Most pupils said that they feel safe. They trust adults to listen to, and act on, their concerns.

The school has raised its expectations of pupils' behaviour. Staff are well supported to manage behaviour by a refreshed system that is followed consistently well. As a result, pupils typically conduct themselves well in lessons. In particular, older pupils are demonstrating a greater enthusiasm for learning. The routines for moving around the school are firmly in place. This means that pupils move sensibly from lessons to playtimes, despite the limitations of the building, in a manner that keeps everyone safe. Pupils said that behaviour has improved. They point to fewer incidents of name-calling and they have greater confidence that any reports of bullying are taken seriously. The school's work to promote regular attendance is also bearing fruit. The proportion of pupils who are absent from school is below the national average.

Pupils are better prepared for life in modern Britain due to a new curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education. They have a greater understanding of the differences that exist between people in society. Pupils typically show care and kindness to others. This contributes to a harmonious atmosphere across the school. While pupils actively participate in democratic acts, such as voting for representatives on the pupil parliament, their broader understanding of fundamental British values remains underdeveloped.

Pupils with special educational needs and/disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified early. Teachers are using resources increasingly well to enable pupils, including those with

SEND, to access the curriculum. However, teachers' expectations of how pupils should record their work are variable across subjects and classes. At times, pupils do not do their best and this is often allowed to go on unheeded. This instils bad habits for the future. Some pupils continue to live with a legacy of weak curriculum design and delivery. Many have gaps in their learning, which hinder them from making the most of the developing curriculum offer. Although teachers are better in checking that pupils understand what has been taught, sometimes misconceptions are not identified or dealt with well enough.

Pupils appreciate the refreshed library area. They are also pleased that the school has replaced old and tatty books with fresh texts. This is beginning to foster a greater interest in reading. While the proportion of Year 1 pupils who met the expected standard in the 2023 phonics screening check matched the national average, the phonics programme is not delivered consistently well. At times, staff do not abide by the chosen approach to teaching letters and the sounds that they represent. Sometimes, staff intervene too much or too quickly when pupils are attempting to blend sounds in order to read the words on the page. This hampers pupils' confidence and their reading fluency.

Children in the early years enjoy exploring the improved activities that are available inside and outside of the classroom. For example, a small group of children could not hide their glee while experimenting with jelly. Messy play is the order of the day for many, because children are well-equipped with waterproofs and wellington boots. However, children are not learning as well as they should. This is because the early years curriculum is underdeveloped. It relies too heavily on end-of-year statutory guidance rather than breaking down what children will learn into small steps. Consequently, the activities that children complete and their interactions with adults are not shaped well enough to what children should know and be able to do.

Improvements to governance have been too slow. It has left the school without the support and challenge that it needs to move on at a pace. It is only in recent weeks that a review of governance has taken place. The changes that have followed this review are embryonic.

Morale among staff has improved. Despite the heavy workload that some staff manage, they are upbeat about the improvements that have happened and optimistic about the next stage of the school's development. Staff feel well supported and valued for their contribution to the progress the school has made since the previous inspection. In contrast, parents hold mixed views about the school. While some recognise the positive impact of recent changes, others are concerned about some aspects of the school's provision. Governors have not done enough to keep parents informed about the school's work so that parents are reassured that the school is moving in the right direction.

The school has embraced the support that has been available through the local authority and the multi-academy trust that it intends to join. This has helped the school to start to build a curriculum that meets its unique context. The school has also used this support effectively to refresh teachers' skills and to strengthen safeguarding procedures.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the director of education for the Diocese of Blackburn, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Olsson
His Majesty's Inspector