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Jonathan Webb  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Webb

### **Monitoring inspection of a school not in a category of concern of Dorchester Middle School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 27 November 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 took place because the school meets the monitoring threshold as set out in the [Monitoring Inspection Handbook](#).

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, during which I spoke to pupils and looked at some pupils' work, scrutinised documentation relating to the curriculum, behaviour and attendance and discussed the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but some aspects of the school need further improvement.**

## Main findings

You started at the school in June 2024. You were joined shortly afterwards by the deputy headteacher who started in September 2024. The school governing committee has been strengthened with the addition of four new governors and is led by a new chair who was appointed in May 2024. Since your arrival, the structure of the school day has been changed. There is now a clearer distinction between the timetables in key stage 2 and key stage 3 and so pupils have break and lunch at different times.

You arrived at the school to find that some things were already improving. For example, the school made strong use of intensive support from the trust to ensure that curriculum planning is more carefully sequenced. The curriculum now has clearer end points that determine what pupils should know and by when. The school has provided focused training for staff on the effective implementation of this improved curriculum, including how to adapt learning to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are beginning to use this training well. For example, they use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and identify gaps in knowledge with greater precision. The impact of the school's work is beginning to be seen in pupils' achievements, including those with SEND. Work in books shows the intended curriculum is being learned with much greater consistency. Pupils' work is of a higher quality. Pupils can talk about what they are learning with greater clarity. However, you recognise there is more to do. For example, you have rightly identified the new curriculum needs more time to embed. Expectations of pupils' work could still be higher. Sometimes, learning is not matched well enough to help pupils build on what they already know or can do successfully.

The school has a much more effective early reading curriculum. Reading is prioritised appropriately. The school has used external support diligently to facilitate staff training, secure more high-quality texts and adapt the library. Staff are increasingly confident in teaching reading. Targeted support is given to pupils who are still in the early phases of reading. Pupils access texts that are matched closely to their knowledge of sounds or ability to read. This all means pupils are increasingly adept readers, as reflected in the school's most recent published results. However, you recognise that those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not secure the same consistent outcomes in reading as their non-disadvantaged peers. You and your team are diligently considering how to close this gap.

You have accelerated the rate of improvement since you arrived. With useful support from the trust, you sensibly focused first on clarifying and improving the impact of leadership at all levels. For example, you have undertaken useful internal reviews to check priority subjects, such as mathematics, history and science. This has helped to ensure that curriculum leads are clear about your expectations, including how they should check the impact of what they are doing on pupils' learning. Governors provide increasingly insightful challenge to the school's work. This has helped refocus all efforts on to the quality of education. The school has also built on some strong work that had started before you arrived to ensure the identification of need and provision for pupils with SEND

is increasingly effective. The school has a more accurate overview of pupils with SEND and what support they should receive. Clearer systems help to make sure that pupils with SEND now benefit from a more tailored provision.

The school's work on improving behaviour is having success. Staff are clearer about how to implement the behaviour policy. Staff recognise and reward positive behaviours with greater consistency. Your arrival has added momentum, as staff and pupils respond to your higher expectations. Pupils feel valued because you listened and made sensible adaptations to the premises. The school is more inviting and welcoming to pupils, as a result. However, you still want more. You and your team are wisely considering how to reduce suspensions further. You are also keen to build on the improved attendance of pupils, which had previously been in decline.

You have engaged successfully with staff, parents and pupils. This has helped ensure there is a shared understanding about what is changing and why. Staff feel great optimism about the improvements being made. Pupils say insightfully that things have become significantly better since September. Many parents agree. These parents rightly recognise that pupils are happier, behaving better and learning more.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Wessex Multi Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Dorset Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes  
**His Majesty's Inspector**