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Mrs Sonia Phillips
Headteacher
West Kingsdown CofE VC Primary School
Fawkham Road
West Kingsdown
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Dear Mrs Phillips

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Kingsdown CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 February, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Rochester.

Yours sincerely
Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013

Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good by:

- providing teachers with training to improve their skills in teaching writing and mathematics
- ensuring teachers have high expectations for the standard of pupils' work and the progress they make
- ensuring that activities enable pupils to be active learners and learn at a fast enough pace so all remain engaged and attentive in lessons
- making sure that pupils are clear about what they are learning in lessons, using accurate assessment information to plan work that is at the right level for pupils of differing abilities and, in particular, is demanding enough for more-able pupils
- ensuring that marking informs pupils about how to improve their work.

Ensure that pupils make at least good progress in English, particularly writing, and mathematics in order to raise their attainment by:

- ensuring that pupils' attainment is assessed accurately and regularly making regular and detailed checks on the progress of individuals and groups so that support can be put in place quickly to prevent underachievement
- developing whole-school strategies to help pupils improve their writing skills as they move up the school
- increasing pupils' understanding of mathematical ideas and their ability to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems
- ensuring that pupils have frequent opportunities to develop their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and communication across a range of subjects.

Improve behaviour and safety by:

- ensuring that pupils are always fully engaged in lessons and their behaviour does not slip
- increasing pupils' awareness of safety when using the internet
- building on the good relationships with parents and carers to ensure that attendance rises.

Increase the capacity of leadership and management in order to improve effectiveness at all levels and drive rapid improvement by ensuring that:

- the school has a fully functioning senior leadership team and that leaders become less dependent on outside support
- middle managers are fully involved in monitoring teaching and achievement in their areas
- improvement plans focus on the urgent need to improve teaching and pupils' progress, and include measurable targets closely linked to the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils
- all staff have clear performance targets linked to pupils' progress and the

- quality of their teaching
- the governing body holds the school to account for its performance and strengthens its monitoring role.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how well this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 February 2014

Evidence

I observed the school's work, including attending an assembly and observing the teaching and learning in all classes. Lesson observations and feedback from these were carried out jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. I scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the mathematics and English subject leaders, three members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority. I had a telephone discussion with a representative of the Diocese of Rochester.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2013, there have been significant changes in staffing and governance. There are different teachers in four out of the seven classes. Most of the changes took place in the autumn term but the Year 6 teacher and the deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2014. Roles and responsibilities of the governing body have been reconfigured. The previous vice chair has taken over the role of Chair of the Governing Body and there is a new clerk.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The checks carried out just before Christmas show that most pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are improving. Most pupils made reasonable progress and Year 5 and Year 6 pupils made particularly good progress in writing and mathematics. The work in pupils' books confirms this positive trend. In most, but not yet all, classes, the quality and quantity of pupils' writing and mathematics is steadily improving and in some classes, such as in Year 1 and Year 5, rapidly so. These are positive signs although there is still a long way to go before pupils achieve as well as they should.

Pupils are keen to do well and, from Reception to Year 6, they readily discuss their learning. For example, reception children were keen to show their writing about planets and to demonstrate their knowledge of three dimensional shapes. Throughout the school pupils are able to use appropriate vocabulary such as alliteration, polygon, persuasive language and rhetorical questions. Younger pupils are beginning to use their knowledge of sounds to spell unfamiliar words. When the teachers are clear about the learning steps, the pupils are able to check their own work to see whether they have achieved success or where they need to improve their work. They enjoy the problem solving activities. As one child commented, 'It's like solving a mystery.' As pupils gain more skills, the level of challenge needs to rise faster because the learning is still too easy for many of them.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. It is usually good in Key Stage 1 and in the Reception class but more variable in Key Stage 2, particularly in the younger classes. To some extent, this is because some of the teachers are relatively new to the school and still finding their feet. Teachers are gaining a better grasp of what pupils should be learning and what they need to do next to achieve the next level in their work. All teachers are now using the same planning formats which include clear objectives and activities which are better matched to the pupils' different abilities. They now provide weekly lessons for pupils to write at length and to solve problems in mathematics so that pupils have more opportunities to develop these skills. The lessons which are less effective require improvement rather than being inadequate. However, this is not good enough to make sure that pupils catch up and achieve as well as they should. In some of the less effective lessons, the teacher and other adults are so focused on making sure they do what is in the plans that they miss opportunities to find out what the pupils already know and they do not adapt lessons to build on that. It is obvious from the pupils' books that, in a few classes, the pupils do not have the chance to complete enough work at a high enough level. Although the teaching of phonics has improved there are still instances of adults mispronouncing the sounds. Similarly there is variation in the style of adults' handwriting and in their use of different methods of calculation.

Teachers try to make lessons interesting to capture pupils' attention and motivate them to produce good work. During the visit it was obvious that pupils had really enjoyed the Astrodome visit. Throughout the school there were activities which capitalised on pupils' interest and enthusiasm, aroused by the visit. For example, Year 6 pupils applied for the position of Space Ranger, Year 5 pupils wrote adverts and jingles advertising space travel, Year 2 pupils researched and recorded information about the first moon landing and Year 1 pupils wrote about being an alien visiting earth.

The quality of teachers' marking has also improved and, in most classes, pupils are given the opportunity to respond to the marking and sometimes try an extra challenge. This is still something which could improve further but there is good practice on which to build. In some classes, pupils use the learning goals to check each other's work, for example, by suggesting that their friend should use more interesting sentence openers.

It is very clear that great efforts have been made to dramatically improve the quality of the learning environment. All classrooms are well organised and there are particularly good examples of classrooms such as Year 2, where the displays on the classroom walls support the pupils' learning very well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are lively, interested and get on well together. The school promotes the importance of being considerate and polite and there have been activities to help pupils recognise and deal with bullying and understand e-safety. There are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. For example, new posts with flashing lights have been installed outside on the road and a letter from a local councillor commends the actions of the school council in bringing about this safety improvement. Pupils behave well in all lessons but, in the better lessons there is a real sense of purpose, everyone listens attentively, joins in discussions and sets about their activities quickly. This was very evident in a Year 1 writing lesson, when, within a few seconds, all the pupils moved to their tables, started their writing and were focused on doing their best.

The school is a more pleasant place to spend time and, as teaching improves, lessons become more interesting. This, along with a regular focus on the importance of coming to school and celebrating good individual and class attendance, means that attendance is improving and is currently just above the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to build on the very good start she had made, and which was commented on, at the time of the inspection in June. She is providing clear direction and has established much higher expectations about the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour. As a result, pupils are beginning to make better progress in English and mathematics. Attendance, behaviour and relationships with parents and carers have also improved. Many more parents and carers have contributed to Parent View and the results are positive. Almost all of these parents and carers would recommend the school to another parent or carer. The newsletters, 'Mrs Phillip's Weekly Highlights' keep everyone focused on what is going well and reflect the positive atmosphere in school. This is enhanced by the transformation of the physical environment which was pretty grim and is now bright, well organised and welcoming. The sense of purpose in the school is very apparent and everyone has a much clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve.

Senior leadership has been strengthened recently by the appointment of the deputy headteacher. Her focus is very much on improving the quality of teaching and learning and she is already making a positive difference. This is a temporary appointment at the moment and the governors are seeking to appoint a permanent deputy headteacher to start in the autumn term. The leaders of English and mathematics have developed well in a short time because of the high-quality guidance and support they are being given. They contribute to the monitoring and therefore know the strengths and weaknesses in the school and are providing increasingly valuable support for their colleagues.

The senior and middle leaders carry out regular monitoring and, in particular, they make sure that there is a strong focus on the pupils' learning by regularly checking

the work in the pupils' books. They have implemented consistent practices for assessing pupils' learning, lesson planning, teachers' marking and behaviour management so that all staff now know what they should be doing and how. In addition, regular training activities and intensive support for particular classes mean that the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are improving. Self-evaluation is accurate and action to address weaknesses is effective.

The governing body used the review following the inspection in June to completely overhaul their arrangements. Roles and responsibilities have been reallocated and the structure of committees has been improved. An experienced clerk is helping to focus the work of the governing body and all governors have undertaken training in how to carry out their roles and responsibilities and to enable them to understand the achievement data. A skills audit is currently being carried out and the governors intend to use the results to recruit suitable new governors. These changes mean that governors are carrying out their roles much more effectively. They visit regularly, know the school well, and have a much higher profile than was the case previously. Every three weeks the Chair of the Governing Body meets with the headteacher and the local authority advisor to scrutinise the improvement plan, monitor the actions and impact and adapt the plan when necessary. This means that the improvement plan is a living document and the regular, in depth scrutiny is helping to drive improvement.

After careful consideration, the governing body has made the decision for the school to become an academy and join the Diocese of Rochester's multi-academy trust. The change to academy status is not likely to happen before January 2015. In the meantime, governors, staff and the diocese are keen to ensure that the school's focus remains firmly on ensuring rapid improvement. The local authority is committed to providing challenge, support and guidance throughout the period prior to the change of status.

External support

The local authority is providing good support, particularly for leadership, and is monitoring and evaluating the school's progress very effectively. The improvement advisor contributes to the regular meetings to monitor progress and amend the improvement plan. She also attends pupil progress meetings and therefore is able to provide evidence to underpin the judgements made at the six weekly local authority progress meetings. The authority has also provided an experienced and effective clerk to the governing body. The authority provides consultant time to support at classroom level but this has not always been available when it would be most useful. The school is also benefiting from working with other schools. For example, some staff have visited other schools to observe good practice and to moderate pupils' writing so that assessments are accurate.