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Mr Keith Cheetham
Acting Executive Headteacher
Northiam Church of England Primary School
Rye
TN31 6NB

Dear Mr Cheetham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Northiam Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 March 2014, 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 July 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not 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 Interim Executive Board (IEB), the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Chris Nye
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better, especially in Years 1, 2, and 3, by ensuring that all staff:
 - have high expectations of what pupils know and can do, especially for more-able pupils, including the quantity of work they complete and that it is presented neatly
 - use the information from their checks on pupils' attainment and progress to plan work that is based on their prior learning and takes into account their different abilities
 - make clear to pupils what they are to learn and achieve by the end of the lesson, and provide sufficient resources, especially in English
 - take lessons at a good pace so the pupils do not lose interest and to misbehave
 - provide teaching assistants with clear guidance about how they can support pupils' learning effectively throughout lessons
 - when marking pupils' work, write legibly, show pupils how to improve their work, and give them time to make corrections.

- Raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - checking that books the younger pupils read are well matched to their abilities, and that they use their knowledge of sounds and letters effectively to read unfamiliar words
 - providing visual aids, especially for the younger pupils, to help them to spell correctly
 - ensuring pupils apply the skills learned in joining their letters in handwriting lessons to all their work
 - helping pupils to learn their number bonds and multiplication tables, recall them quickly and apply them to problems they have to solve
 - ensuring that the gap in attainment between those known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium and others in the school is closed rapidly.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school, including governance, and build the capacity to improve by:
 - working in partnership with the local authority to secure strong and effective leadership for the school from September 2013
 - taking urgent action to train governors in how to be fully effective in their roles, especially in safeguarding
 - improve the leadership skills of those currently leading the school, especially in accurate self-evaluation and raising the quality of teaching
 - introduce robust appraisal procedures so that all leaders, managers and staff are held to account for pupils' achievements
 - review the programme of work and check its implementation rigorously

to ensure that it is broad and balanced, and gives the right amount of time to physical education

- developing a strong partnership with parents so that they are confident in the way that the school is led, that their concerns are dealt with effectively, that they receive valuable information about their child's progress, and homework is appropriate for their child's age
- conducting an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 March 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and head of school, groups of parents and carers, staff and pupils, and a representative from the local authority. He had a telephone discussion with the Chair of the IEB. He observed teaching in every class and scrutinised pupils' work in books and on wall displays.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has made a number of significant changes. The governing body has been replaced by an interim executive board and the leadership structure has been reinforced by the appointment of a temporary, but full time, head of school to support the work of the part-time acting executive headteacher. Two senior teachers are currently on long-term sick leave and their classes are being taught by a supply teacher and the head of school, supported by an experienced deputy headteacher from the partnership school. In January, the Reception class teacher was replaced by a temporary teacher. A new bursar and caretaker have been appointed. The number of classes has been reduced from four to three with the Reception and Year One classes being amalgamated into one.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Across the school, pupils' achievement has improved significantly, but such improvements are still comparatively recent. Pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is accelerating, and attainment is rising, but both need securely embedding.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children got off to a slow start, but since January, their progress has accelerated. As a result, the percentage of children on track to attain a good level of development in reading and writing has risen from well under 30% in December to over 60% at the halfway point in the year. In Year 1, good teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) means that pupils are using these skills effectively to read unfamiliar words, although some pupils are not forming their letters correctly.

The school's most recent assessment of pupils' progress shows that in most year groups pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets. At Key Stage 1, progress has been a little slower in mathematics and reading, but in writing, pupils are on track to exceed their targets. At Key Stage 2, progress has been slower in mathematics because, although a calculation policy has been introduced to ensure a common approach towards teaching number bonds and multiplication tables, this is not yet being consistently applied across the school. Recently, urgent action has

been taken to raise standards in mathematics, and early indications are promising. For example, an exceptionally talented teacher from the partnership school has been drafted in to teach mathematics three times a week to the older class and inspection evidence confirms the school's view that this is having a rapid and positive impact on pupils' learning in this subject.

There has also been a rapid improvement in the achievement of vulnerable pupils such as those with disabilities or special educational needs and those who benefit from the government's pupil premium funding. Over 70% are on track to meet their targets and the gap between their achievement and other pupils in the school is rapidly closing, especially at Key Stage 2.

The school has built up the stock of suitable reading materials and resources, especially for younger pupils, and the development of strategies to encourage pupils to read widely and often is successfully encouraging pupils to develop their reading skills and a love of literature. Standards of handwriting and presentation are also improving, especially in those classes where teachers model a high-quality cursive handwriting style.

The quality of teaching

Good teaching was observed in every class, with some, especially in the older class, being outstanding. However, although the quality of teaching is significantly better than it was at the last inspection, because of the temporary staffing arrangements, improvements are not sufficiently secure or well enough embedded.

During the inspection, it was evident that teachers have high expectations of pupils and that they make good use of what they know and understand, in order to plan their lessons. They ensure that tasks and activities are well matched to the wide range of pupils' abilities in each class and they skilfully adjust their teaching when questioning identifies any misconceptions. Teachers make clear to pupils what they are going to learn in their lessons, so that they have a good understanding of what is expected of them. Pupils know their targets and what they need to do to achieve them, and enjoy their learning. As one pupil commented, 'Lessons are fun and exciting, and we learn a lot.' As a result, pupils, including the most able, feel challenged and make good progress in lessons.

The most effective teaching inspires and motivates pupils. This was observed in the oldest class in a series of lessons on Macbeth which not only developed literacy skills but also encouraged a love of literature. The pace of learning in lessons is generally brisk, but when this is slower, it is often because pupils are less engaged in the tasks and some misbehave.

Teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to the quality of teaching, although the school recognises the need to update some of their training, especially in supporting some of their work with pupils who are making slower progress.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work has improved recently, but earlier in the year, this was too variable, with some work going unmarked for too long. Leaders have identified this issue and are taking appropriate steps to resolve it. Currently, teachers' written comments are detailed and evaluative, providing pupils with suitable guidance on how to improve. Comments are linked clearly to learning objectives and there is recent evidence of marking having a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, the school's policy on encouraging pupils to respond to marking, thus taking responsibility for their own learning, is not yet fully embedded.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A recent review of the behaviour policy has resulted in an improvement in pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. A strength is the way in which older pupils care for younger ones and this is encouraged through such strategies as 'family tables' at lunchtime. In class, effective behaviour management strategies are used well to support the few pupils who find behaving well a challenge.

Pupils say that they feel safe, well cared for and enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in attendance figures, which are above the national average. Although bullying or extreme behaviour are unusual, the school has rigorous systems in place for recording and resolving such incidents. Pupils are well trained in how to keep themselves safe. For example, they know about different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and they know what to do if they encounter it.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the school has undergone significant changes since the last inspection, and the acting executive headteacher and newly appointed temporary head of school have been tireless in their drive to improve the quality of teaching so as to raise pupils' achievement. However, because of the temporary and unsettled nature of staffing, leadership and governance, a permanent solution has not yet been found, although options are being actively explored. The local authority and all leaders, including members of the interim executive board, recognise the urgent need to resolve this situation.

Leaders rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, so they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Accurate information, gathered from lesson observations and tracking pupils' progress, is used effectively to inform the management of teachers' and teaching assistants' performance. Strategic plans to improve the quality of provision are kept under constant review, and are suitably adjusted to reflect the school's changing situation.

The local authority has taken appropriate urgent action to review governance of the school, and the interim executive board that replaced the governing body has played an important and effective part in both challenging and supporting the leadership in

its drive to improve the school. They are knowledgeable, well led and, although only recently appointed, demonstrate a commitment and sense of urgency. There is now a greater degree of confidence in the school's capacity to improve and this is illustrated by the planned return of the school's delegated budget (which was withdrawn before the last inspection) at the start of the next financial year.

Parents and carers have expressed concerns about decisions that the school has had to make, for example regarding the amalgamation of Reception and Year One classes. However, because leaders have been accessible and have clearly explained the reasons for such changes, there is evidence that parents and carers now have increasing confidence in the leadership of the school. Parents and carers who met the inspector expressed the view that, since January, there has been a marked improvement in the support that their children are receiving, and more effective communications mean that they have a greater awareness of how well their children are doing. Homework expectations are now much clearer and a whole-school policy is consistently applied.

The school is in the process of reviewing its programmes of work, and has taken urgent and appropriate action to increase the time that pupils spend on physical education in lessons and through enrichment activities such as games, dance and sport. However, finalising plans for what and how pupils will learn in other subjects is still on-going.

External support

The local authority has provided good-quality support which has been well matched to the needs of the school. Their support plan has been appropriately updated to take account of the school's changing circumstances. As a result, the support provided by a range of consultants is having a positive impact on helping the school to address the issues raised at the last inspection. This has been particularly effective in ensuring better-focused teaching and support for vulnerable pupils. The local authority has an accurate view of the progress that the school has made since the last inspection, and is optimistic about the future. However, it is aware that improvements are currently fragile and that it has an important role to play in helping the school to find permanent solutions to the governance and leadership and management issues.