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5 June 2014

Mr K Cheetham  
Northiam Church of England Primary School  
Main Street  
Rye  
TN31 6NB

Dear Mr Cheetham

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

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 June 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 third 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 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 Governing Body, 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 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 and carers 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 third monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 June 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the executive headteacher and head of school, a group of parents and carers, staff and pupils, and a representative from the local authority. He held a telephone discussion with the Interim Director of Education for Chichester Diocese. 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 changes. Two teachers remain on sick leave and the oldest class is currently being taught by two teachers, job-sharing on temporary contracts. The other two classes are also being taught by temporary teachers. A special educational needs coordinator from the partnership school has been temporarily appointed to this role for one day per week, and will take up the post shortly. The executive headteacher, who is the substantive headteacher of the partnership school, and head of school have agreed to extend their temporary leadership roles until at least the end of December. Control of the school's delegated budget, which had previously been withdrawn by the local authority, has been returned to the school. The library has been refurbished and playground upgraded.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The school has continued to build upon the improving achievement of pupils noted in the previous monitoring inspection report. A particular strength is the rapid improvement in children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the autumn, only a few children were expected to achieve a good level of development, especially in reading and writing. However, because of securely good teaching since January, almost all are now on track to achieve a good level of development in all areas of their learning.

Pupils in Year 1 have also made good progress in reading, writing and their understanding of the sounds that letters make (phonics). This is because this aspect is well taught and there is a strong emphasis placed on pupils enjoying and understanding what they are reading. Those pupils who struggle with reading and writing are well supported and make good progress, relative to their starting points. The stock of reading and library books has been reorganised to ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities are reading texts appropriate to the level of reading development.

In Year 2, the percentage of pupils on track to achieve the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics is slightly below that found nationally because of the high number of pupils with special educational needs. However, the percentage on track to achieve the higher levels is above average in writing and close to this in reading and mathematics. This is because higher-achieving pupils respond well to teaching which expects them to do their best.

Pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 is good overall in reading, writing and mathematics, and gaps between what pupils are achieving and national expectations are closing. This is particularly evident in Year 6 where, although pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is expected to be below average, their progress from very low starting points is impressive. Almost all pupils equalled, and most exceeded, the expected two levels of progress in reading, writing and mathematics since they were in Year 2. This rapid improvement has mostly been achieved this year because of the wholehearted commitment of leaders to address a history of underachievement.

Throughout the school, the quality of pupils' writing is improving. This is due to a strong emphasis being placed on the teaching of spelling, high expectations regarding presentation and an emphasis on writing that is purposeful. For example, pupils in the older class were observed enthusiastically planning a newspaper front page for the outbreak of the First World War, which will form part of an exhibition in the village hall, commemorating the centenary.

In mathematics, pupils' achievement has improved since the re-introduction of the calculation policy with new staff, which is helping to ensure a consistent approach to teaching number bonds and multiplication tables. However, where progress is slightly slower, this is often a result of insufficient challenge to pupils of higher ability.

The progress of pupils who benefit from additional government funding, known as pupil premium, and those who have special educational needs, is improving. Gaps between their achievement and other pupils are narrowing in some year groups, but in others, because all pupils are making better progress, the gaps remain the same.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching is improving. As a result, for the majority of pupils, attainment and progress have improved rapidly this year. However, as all teachers are currently on temporary contracts, except for one part time teacher contracted for one day per week, the quality of teaching is not yet secure enough to ensure that it remains consistently good in the future. Leaders are very aware that resolving this issue is now a matter of urgency.

Learning activities are now well-planned and structured. Links to previous learning are made explicit and this ensures that the wide-ranging needs and abilities of pupils

are now met. As a result, pupils know what they are going to learn and what they need to do to succeed. Teachers' raised expectations are having a positive impact on the development of pupils' skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening. Consequently, pupils' presentation is improving. Teaching assistants are working much more closely with teachers to plan and assess learning activities. They are providing effective, well-planned support, within the classroom, for pupils who struggle. This is having a beneficial effect on improving pupils' achievement, particularly in reading and writing.

The quality of teachers' questioning is improving. As a result, pupils are encouraged effectively to think more carefully and develop their understanding. For example, in the youngest class, highly effective and patient questioning was encouraging very young pupils not only to read a story accurately, but also to infer successfully what was happening.

The quality of marking has continued to improve. Pupils are more responsive to teachers' comments and there is an increasing emphasis on pupils assessing their own work. This is helping them to see more clearly what they need to do to improve and to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' comments, especially in Years 2 and 3, are detailed and very helpful. In the older class, marking is more variable. Although guidance to pupils on what and how to improve in mathematics is very clear, in literacy it is less detailed.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. The recently updated behaviour management policy is proving to be effective inasmuch that although some low level disruption was noted in the previous monitoring inspection, none was observed on this inspection.

Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place and are rigorously applied, and pupils say that they feel safe and valued by adults, and that they enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in the continued improvement this year in attendance figures, which are currently significantly above national averages for all groups of pupils. Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning and enjoy the wide range of curriculum opportunities available to them, especially in sports, drama and art. They are confident and polite, and take their responsibilities, such as playground 'buddies', very seriously.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Under the very effective, albeit temporary, leadership of the executive headteacher and head of school, the quality of what the school provides has continued to improve, and this is reflected in the speeding-up of pupils' progress across the

school. Leaders know the school very well because they closely monitor the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and therefore have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

They have been very proactive in addressing the issues raised at the inspection which judged that the school required special measures. Programmes of work have been reviewed, and sport and physical education (PE) has a significantly higher profile. The school has worked effectively with its partnership school to ensure that plans for the implementation of new National Curriculum in September are in place. The process for setting targets for staff has been established. Staff are now more effectively held to account for the school's improvement, although currently this only applies to permanent staff and leaders.

The parents and carers who met the inspector have a very high regard for the executive headteacher and head of school. One commented that, under their leadership, their children have 'thrived'. Leaders are accessible and supportive, and even when difficult decisions have had to be made, they always ensure that parents and carers are kept fully informed as to the reasons. A newly formed 'Friends of Northiam' is helping to further strengthen the partnership with parents and carers.

The IEB is securely established. It is well led and organised, knows the school well and is effectively holding leaders to account. For example, the IEB has robustly challenged the executive headteacher to justify budget proposals and adjustments so that the best use is made of resources, such as in supporting vulnerable pupils.

The school is aware that it needs to update some of its strategic plans to reflect the progress made this year and future developments. It is also aware of the need to strengthen the reports on its website regarding how additional government funding, such as for sports and in supporting those who benefit from the pupil premium funding, is used and the impact that this has on outcomes for pupils.

The day-to-day leadership and management of the school is a strength. However, the lack of progress in making longer-term decisions regarding the status, leadership and governance of the school is becoming an increasing concern. The school has developed an effective partnership with a neighbouring school and this has been a key factor in the drive to improve the school. However, although Chichester Diocese is committed to build upon these successes, uncertainty exists about the future structure and status of the school because the Diocese has been slow to communicate the details and timing of its plans for the school's future. Until this issue is resolved, the school's capacity to build upon recent progress and improvements is not sufficiently secure.

## **External support**

The local authority has provided good-quality support which is well matched to the needs of the school as it takes full account of the school's changing circumstances. The support has been well aligned to that provided by the partnership school, and is illustrated by the training given with regard to further raising standards in mathematics and the school's implementation of the new National Curriculum. The local authority has continued to rigorously monitor the school's journey out of special measures and recognises that now is the time to review its support plan to reflect the school's future needs. It has an accurate view of the progress that the school has made since the last monitoring inspection, but is aware that improvements remain fragile and that it has an important role to play in helping the school to find permanent solutions to the governance, leadership and management issues. As such, it is negotiating with Chichester Diocese to ensure a rapid resolution to the uncertainty over the school's future status.