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Jonathan Jones
Headteacher
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Tennyson Road
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Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Castlechurch Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a governor representative, a Local Leader of Education and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I looked at a small sample of pupils' books and the records of monitoring activities undertaken by you.

Context

There have been no changes to the staffing since the inspection in March 2014. One member of staff has tendered her resignation to take effect from the end of the summer term. The local authority and governor representatives are at an early stage of discussions regarding possible academy status in the future. There is a vacancy on the governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Your immediate priority has been to improve pupils' behaviour and raise standards in reading. A revised behaviour policy has been introduced, and rewards and sanctions have been shared with the pupils. You recognise that teachers' expectations are too low and that the curriculum has been uninspiring. A small sample of pupils' work shows evidence of increased challenge. You have not yet made sufficiently clear links between pupils' behaviour in lessons and the quality of teaching, pupils' attitudes to learning, and how well their learning needs are met. Planned actions focus on improving behaviour but the causes of occasional pupils' restlessness in lessons have been overlooked. As a consequence, planned initiatives related to behaviour do not get to the core of the matter: the quality of teaching. Leaders and managers will work with the Local Leader of Education to focus more on these links.

You have introduced a new scheme to improve pupils' reading skills. Teachers and some governors gave up their own time to receive the necessary training for its implementation. Although at an early stage, the new approaches are showing signs of a more systematic approach to the teaching of reading and pupils are beginning to benefit. You introduced a new marking policy in September last year so that clear steps could be taken to feed back to pupils in their books. Teachers' written comments in pupils' books were weaker in mathematics than in English. A new scheme for mathematics is to be introduced in September this year. A system to track pupils' progress has been introduced but teachers' assessments of levels at which pupils are working are not sufficiently accurate. This fundamental weakness undermines the validity of the tracking information.

You are considering making changes to the school's management structure. You have recognised the necessity to capture the relevant and available expertise within the staff, devolve appropriate responsibilities and further hold individuals to account. The assistant headteacher has a clear view of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses. Her ability to identify appropriate improvement strategies is an asset to the school. You have rightly tried to plan and implement actions with a sense of urgency but, without priorities being coherently communicated, there is a danger that staff feel bombarded by initiatives. Staff have demonstrated a willingness to move forward and bring about changes for the better but they need precise direction and purpose.

A Local Leader of Education (LLE) has been commissioned by the local authority. She began work with the school very recently but has attended staff meetings and quickly focused her attentions on raising staff's expectations of pupils. She has provided examples of good-quality work produced by pupils in another school to demonstrate clearly that Castlechurch pupils are not achieving or presenting work of a high enough standard. The LLE and assistant headteacher have confirmed weaknesses in teachers' assessments of pupils' achievements. The LLE has provided

opportunities for members of staff to observe good-quality teaching at her school. Staff at Castlechurch have welcomed the good examples and they are determined to take on the new approaches. You have increased the checks on teachers' plans, pupils' work and lesson observations, and acknowledge that these have not always been robust enough in the past. Current monitoring documents demonstrate a suitable range of foci and evaluations for individual teachers.

Governors are keen to take on advice from the review of governance planned for next week and a review of how the pupil premium funding is used to support pupils. Governors have attended staff and phase meetings and set up a forum to better communicate with parents. Those governors who attended training on data immediately prior to the school inspection appreciate the importance of placing the school's performance and progress data in the context of the national picture. This training, and the outcomes of the inspection, have strengthened the governors' confidence in asking probing questions and holding leaders to account. They rightly recognise their role in challenging leaders and managers where provision and outcomes are a cause for concern. Governors report that they have identified a strong determination within the staff to take on the necessary challenges.

You have formulated a school improvement plan which tackles all of the areas for improvement identified in the previous section 5 inspection. The aspect concerning raising teachers' expectations requires greater focus. The necessary actions and those responsible for leading them are plainly identified. The timing for each action is rather general but the six-weekly record and evaluation of events effectively keeps track of the completed activities. You and other school leaders and governors use this document as 'work in progress' and expect to regularly modify actions in response to your progress. Those responsible for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress are not identified. However, the LLE and local authority commissioning manager for school improvement acknowledge that they expect to have key roles in both of these aspects.

The local authority commissioning manager for school improvement knows the school well. She has a clear view of areas for improvement based on her observations of lessons, pupils' work and discussions with leaders, managers, teachers and governors. She was diligent in seeking a Local Leader of Education who could bring the necessary knowledge and expertise to Castlechurch. The local authority's statement of action includes all of the relevant areas for improvement. The proposed actions tackle the weaknesses identified in the inspection report and focus appropriately on the actions the local authority can realistically take. Those responsible for monitoring are identified. There are clear plans to broker and commission appropriate support from available sources. The commissioning manager is aware of teachers' inaccurate assessments of pupils and has invited Entrust to provide training and support. In addition, training has been arranged to improve the quality of teachers' written feedback to pupils. A core group has been set up to

evaluate the impact of interventions and track the school's progress. The statement of action includes clear milestones over the two-year period, with expected measurable outcomes.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector