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Mr A Livingstone
Interim Headteacher
Stansted Church of England Primary School
Malthouse Road
Stansted
Sevenoaks
Kent TN15 7PH

Dear Mr Livingstone

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stansted Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 July 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 Interim Executive Board, the Diocese of Rochester and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's 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 typically good or better through the school by:
 - making teachers' explanations shorter and sharper so pupils can get down to work more quickly
 - ensuring that those pupils who are capable of harder work start more challenging activities earlier in the lesson
 - giving pupils more options in deciding how to complete the tasks set for them
 - planning activities in the Reception class that really stretch children, stimulate them to learn without direct adult support and motivate them to persist with an activity.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - taking concerted action to ensure the effective long-term leadership and management of the school
 - ensuring that senior leaders have the necessary skills to drive improvements without the need for significant external support
 - ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and subject coordinators are clear, manageable and effective
 - making sure that routines to involve staff in monitoring and developing the quality of teaching are implemented as soon as possible
 - ensuring that the proposed external review of governance takes place as soon as possible to assess how the governing body can contribute to improving the school's effectiveness.

- Improve pupils' achievement, particularly in writing, by:
 - ensuring that pupils write longer pieces of work, particularly those who are capable of higher levels
 - giving pupils more guidance on how to spell accurately and to write creatively
 - making sure that pupils' writing in other subjects is presented more carefully and completed to as high a standard as in English
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills within day-to-day activities and other subjects
 - ensuring pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 July 2014

Evidence

I observed the school's work including attending an assembly, looking at pupils' books, and observing the teaching and learning in classrooms. I visited all classes and teaching groups, and observed teaching in phonics, English, mathematics and science. I briefly visited a games session led by the sports coach. I scrutinised documents, and met with the interim headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator, five members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a group of parents and carers, and a representative from the local authority. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the Diocese of Rochester.

Context

The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board. One teacher left at Easter, and a part-time teacher and a sports coach joined the school. The interim headteacher's contract with the school has been extended until next Easter.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are improving and the pace of improvement is speeding up. Improvements to the organisation and teaching of early reading and writing mean that the younger pupils are getting a much better grounding than was the case previously in the use of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). As a result, almost all of the pupils achieved the expected standard in the recent phonic screening checks. In these group sessions, there is a good focus on reading, writing and listening, but not enough emphasis on speaking.

There has also been a rise in the number of pupils achieving the expected standards in the end of Key Stage 2 national tests. Achievement at the end of Key Stage 1 remains too low because, until recently, the Years 2 and 3 pupils have had poor teaching. Although standards are beginning to rise, pupils have not caught up yet to where they should be, given their starting points. During the second half of the year, many pupils, particularly older ones, have made good progress in their writing, because this was very weak. The evidence in pupils' books confirms that pupils' skills are improving both in terms of the quantity and the quality of their work. This is most obvious in the books of the older pupils because they have had the best quality of teaching throughout the year.

There is an improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning. They concentrate better and are generally keen to do well. When they are given the opportunity to work on their own without constant prompting by adults, they show that they are capable of persevering and doing well. There is still a tendency for pupils to seek constant help and reassurance because they have become used to receiving too much support and not given enough opportunities to work things out for themselves. This is still the

norm in some groups and classes. There is more scope to improve what is provided for the youngest pupils to extend their learning.

Although there is an improvement in the content of pupils' written work, this is hampered by a lack of an agreed policy on handwriting. Older pupils have not all developed a fluent style of writing and adults do not model good practice. The older pupils also, having missed out on basic phonics teaching, find spelling unfamiliar words a challenge. At times, they also misspell words which are either displayed in the classroom or are everyday words which they frequently use. This suggests that adults do not always show that they expect accuracy.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is much improved since the last visit. No inadequate teaching was observed this time and it is clear from the observations, and from the pupils' books, that the oldest pupils are benefiting from teaching which is usually good. Otherwise, the teaching generally requires improvement with some good features. The quality of the provision for the youngest pupils, particularly in the outside area, remains a cause for concern and requires urgent attention.

Activities are planned carefully and teachers try to make the learning interesting. Parents and carers commented that their children are much more enthusiastic about their learning now. The school has reorganised the teaching groups for phonics, mathematics and English so that there is not such a wide span of ability in each group. As a result, the pitch of activities is better so that, for example, pupils who are capable of harder work are challenged from the outset. Sometimes, the organisation is not quite right for the maturity of the group so that, for example, some Year 1 pupils spend all morning on fairly static activities. As a result, they, understandably, become fidgety towards lunchtime. There are still too few opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, and this is exacerbated by two things. Adults do not give pupils enough time to think for themselves, and therefore pupils tend to wait for adults to prompt them or help them straightaway. This is more noticeable in the younger classes. Older pupils are beginning to become used to getting on, thinking for themselves and making decisions. This was noticeable when they were filming each other using their tablets, as part of the activities related to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Teachers carefully mark pupils' work and usually give them useful guidance. There are good examples of pupils responding to the marking and improving their work or completing additional challenges. Sometimes, the challenges appear to require more time than is allowed for the pupils to respond.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are safe and happy in school. This is confirmed by a much more positive response to Parent View, the online questionnaire, than was the case at the time of

the previous visit. Pupils are friendly and helpful towards adults and each other. The only time when this slips was seen where pupils sometimes ignore the adults and carry on talking to each other instead of listening. This could be because they are so used to hearing adult voices in classrooms that they occasionally just 'tune out'. Most pupils come to school every day and attendance is broadly average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim headteacher had just started at the school at the last visit and was faced with a daunting task. Rumours about the future of the school, parent concerns and staff absences have not made this any easier and have, at times, threatened to distract him and hinder the pace of improvement. However, he has implemented changes so that there have been improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. As part of the drive to improve the quality of teaching, and given the size of the school, he teaches each morning. This means that formal checks on the quality of teaching have not been rigorous enough: some adults have not been observed or given developmental feedback to help them improve their practice. Nonetheless, teachers' planning is checked and pupils' books also looked at regularly to make sure that improvements are taking place.

Staff and pupils have benefited from training, particularly, in the teaching of early reading and writing. This aspect was an area of huge concern during the last visit and there has been a significant improvement. Leadership is enhanced by the appointment of the permanent teacher to the role of special educational needs co-ordinator. She has made a good start to organising the relevant information, building her skills and her understanding of the role. She has developed an air of quiet authority which can be seen in classrooms, and when she leads assemblies.

The IEB has only recently been established. Members of the IEB have a wide range of valuable skills and experience, and have allocated different responsibilities to those best qualified to carry them out. The school currently has an embryonic development plan and self-evaluation document. Both of these require amendment to ensure they are realistic and manageable. The IEB should consider these documents urgently and ensure that they have a significant, strategic role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and accuracy of both.

External support

The rather turbulent atmosphere around the future of the school means that there is a level of mistrust and division which is not helpful to the education of the pupils currently in the school. The local authority is fulfilling its monitoring and evaluation role well through its six-weekly meetings. However, the school requires extensive external support and there are differing views about whether or not appropriate support has been forthcoming or readily accepted. For example, it is important that mentor support is provided as a matter of urgency for the interim headteacher. Equally, it is important that the school works in partnership with external colleagues,

accepts support and builds on the guidance provided by advisers and consultants. For example, the local authority has provided a significant amount of advisory support for the Early Years Foundation Stage, but this has not been built on effectively by the school. The diocese will provide advisory support starting from the beginning of next term.