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Caroline Phipps
Headteacher
The CofE School of St Edmund and St John
Beechwood Road
Dudley
DY2 7QA

Dear Ms Phipps

Special measures monitoring inspection of The CofE School of St Edmund and St John

Following my visit to your school on 10 September 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 May 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher and with the attendance officer. I met with the Chair of the Governing Body and five governors. In addition, I met with a representative from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. I also considered a number of other documents including the school's safeguarding, child protection and attendance policies.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection three teachers left the school at the end of the summer term and four new teachers joined the school in September. Three classes are currently being taught by temporary teachers. Governors have made the decision that the school should become an academy. This conversion is due to take place on 1 January 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

It was clear from my discussions with you, and with members of the governing body, that you have accepted the areas for improvement identified in the inspection and understand that these weaknesses must be tackled as a matter of urgency. You have drawn up plans that, helpfully, are closely matched to the local authority's statement of action. These lay out the school's direction and aims in a suitably staged journey. However, your evaluation of the impact of training or changes in policy and practice is vague. For example, you state that you trialed a new marking policy in mathematics at the end of the summer term. Your assessment of its impact was that 'this was successful and moved the learning forward and it was rolled out to all staff in September 2014'.

You are aware that pupils' reading skills are exceptionally low and you have planned training to update teachers' skills in teaching phonics (sounds that letters make) to help tackle this. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

With support from staff at a local primary school, you and other senior leaders have checked the accuracy of the information you have about pupils' progress. Senior leaders now pull together the information they gather from teachers' assessments of pupils' progress from the work in their books and from visits to lessons. You are beginning to analyse this information and identify the pupils who are not making enough progress so that appropriate support can be provided. However, apart from those pupils in Year 6, you are not tracking pupils' progress from their individual starting points. For example, your records show progress for pupils in Year 4 from September to July of that year, but not from the results of their Year 2 national tests. This means that leaders do not have a clear enough picture of pupils' learning over time as pupils move from year group to year group.

Senior leaders review pupils' work with some useful analysis made. This more demanding approach is beginning to provide you with a more accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within teaching. However, the findings lack precision and are not enabling you to eradicate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress rapidly enough.

Governors have responded well to the external review of governance completed prior to the school's previous inspection. The governors have reorganised their committees to make sure that the effectiveness of leaders can be monitored more closely, paying particular attention to leaders' impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' attainment.

The local authority carried out a first-hand review of the school's progress during a two-day monitoring visit last term and has plans for a further review to take place at the end of September. This is a useful method for keeping a close check on how quickly things are improving. The statement of action sets out clear timescales for improvement for the first year. The plan gives clear 'milestones' for the improvement needed in attainment for pupils in Years 2 and 6 but not for other year groups. This might be helpful to include as the report specifically mentions the importance of improving pupils' progress in Years 1 to 4.

I reviewed the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe and identified areas where significant improvements are required. For example, you and the governors were unaware that the school's safeguarding policy and many of the school's practices do not meet current guidelines. For example, no overseas checks are completed or checks carried out to see if teachers have been prohibited from teaching. A scrutiny of teachers' files also showed that references are not always kept on file and some do not provide all the information required. The records kept for any safeguarding concerns do not contain sufficient detail and do not always include dated records of all actions taken. The school's extended use of part-time timetables as a means of managing behaviour is completely unacceptable. It does not fit with government guidance and constitutes a potential safeguarding issue. I recommend that as a matter of urgency the headteacher, governors and the local authority work together to rectify the weaknesses identified above and ensure policies meet current guidelines. I will make further checks on the effectiveness of the safeguarding procedures at my next visit.

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 Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector