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11 September 2014

Mrs Frances Nash
The Headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School
Fairfield Road
New Romney
TN28 8BP

Dear Mrs Nash

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and two other board members. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority. I was shown around the school, making brief visits to all classes, and I looked at a sample of pupils' work from Key Stages 1 and 2. I examined the register of checks on staff, the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Context

Since the last inspection a significant number of teaching staff have left the school. Many of these vacancies have been filled by newly qualified teachers (NQTs). A review of leadership roles and responsibilities has been completed and a specific post of special educational needs coordinator has been introduced.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

While you and other senior leaders agree that major improvements need to be made across the school, there is insufficient urgency in bringing this about. The school improvement plan contains actions which address all the necessary elements but lacks precision in terms of how the impact will be checked. In these cases, reviews of progress focus on the completion of tasks rather than on the effectiveness of the improvement. You are right to want to combine the school plan with the local authority support plan to create one document understood and agreed by everyone, but you need to move on this more quickly.

The school has suffered from high staff turnover over a protracted period of time. At the start of this academic year approximately half of the teaching staff are new and of these, half are newly qualified teachers. You and other leaders have rightly highlighted the need to secure consistently good teaching in all year groups and to ensure that the necessary training and support are in place to realise this. Your plan has the right initial actions to bring this about.

The newly formed IEB is a significant strength, with members possessing extensive relevant expertise. Under the strong leadership of the Chair, the IEB is quickly identifying the most critical issues that must be tackled first. Most experienced board members are taking responsibility for supporting and challenging the school in specific areas, including achievement and leadership.

The recommended pupil premium review has been undertaken. It has provided some useful advice, including the need to improve systems to track the achievement of this group of pupils. The advice is at an early stage of implementation.

The local authority's statement of action is comprehensive and includes a reasonable range of support mechanisms. The improvement adviser helpfully meets fortnightly with you to monitor progress and offer advice. Formal review meetings take place every six weeks.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the IEB, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Bridger-Wilkinson
Seconded Inspector