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Mrs Nicki Man
The Acting Headteacher
Lydd Primary School
20 Skinner Road
Lydd
Romney Marsh
TN29 9HN

Dear Mrs Man

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lydd Primary School

Following my visit with Theresa Phillips, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Evelyn Riley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 not making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school's action plan remains unfit for purpose.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching to bring about good progress for all pupils in Key Stage 2 by:
 - regularly checking the pace of learning of more-able pupils to ensure they make the best possible progress
 - ensuring pupils of average ability are challenged to work toward the higher levels
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their extended writing skills
 - planning activities for pupils to learn to apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems for themselves
 - teachers' written guidance enabling pupils to understand how well they are doing and how they can further improve their work to move to the next level in their learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:
 - subject leaders using sharper measures of success for all pupils, including the more able
 - checking the quality of teaching more closely for its impact on pupils' learning to determine how to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement, especially in writing
 - developing the effectiveness of governors so they have a more accurate view of the school's performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how well this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and examined a range of documents. This included the revised local authority statement of action and school improvement plan, information about pupils' achievement, pupils' work, records of governors' meetings and local authority reports. Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the consultant from The Village Academy, school staff and pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body with three other governors, a representative of the local authority, and the Principal of The Village Academy. Inspectors also talked with parents in the playground at the start of the day.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term. Governors appointed the deputy headteacher to the post of acting headteacher with effect from 1 September 2014. Three teachers left in the summer and two returned from maternity leave at the start of the autumn term. Full time supply teachers are teaching in Year 3 and Year 5. After the last monitoring inspection, the local authority arranged support for the school from The Village Academy. Since then, the deputy principal of the academy has been working as a consultant in the school for two days each week on average. The academy principal visits the school to oversee this support.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Assessments, completed at the school in the summer term, show that, in writing, more pupils in Year 6 attained the expected level, and more attained the higher than expected level than in previous years. This shows that the progress these pupils made in writing during Key Stage 2 was better than in previous years. The school reliably checked the accuracy of these assessments.

Pupils' progress in mathematics and reading did not improve overall. The proportion of Year 6 pupils who attained the expected levels in the reading and mathematics tests in 2014 declined compared with the previous year, as did the proportion of pupils who made the expected progress in mathematics during Key Stage There was some evidence that more able pupils did better. For example, the proportion attaining the higher than expected level in mathematics increased. In reading, there was no improvement in the proportion who attained the higher than expected level.

Achievement at the end of Key Stage 1 declined as measured by the 2014 teacher assessments. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected levels in reading and writing fell to below the national standards reported for 2013 (the last available national figures). The proportion who achieved the expected level in mathematics

also declined, but remained on a par with the comparable national standard. No pupils at the school achieved the higher than expected level in reading or writing, compared with a third of pupils at the school achieving this level in both areas in 2013. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher than expected level in mathematics also declined sharply. As a result, achievement at the end of Key Stage 1 in the summer term 2014 was weaker than that noted by the section 5 inspection.

Similarly, at the end of Reception Year in 2014, the proportion of children at the school who achieved a good level of development fell by almost half compared with 2013. Consequently, the level of learning achieved by these pupils showed the 'good start' in the Early Years Foundation Stage, identified in the section 5 inspection, had not been sustained.

Senior leaders did not take appropriate action after the inspection to make sure that teachers across the school were accurately collecting and recording information about pupils' progress. When the academy consultant became involved in the school in the summer and checked the school's records of pupils' achievement, these were found to be inaccurate. Better systems were introduced immediately, and suitable training was provided for staff. As a result, pupils' levels of attainment were checked and recorded more accurately by teachers before the school year ended. However, due to the inaccuracy of the earlier records, the school was unable to measure well enough the progress pupils made during the last school year.

These summer term assessments show that pupils now in Years 3, 4 and 5 are not on track to achieve national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading, writing or mathematics. They show that current Year 6 pupils are also 'off-track' in reading, writing and mathematics, but with narrower gaps to be closed. In the current Year 2, the assessments show that pupils are trailing behind national expectations most significantly in mathematics, with smaller gaps needing to be closed in reading and writing. Senior leaders and the academy consultant have checked this information carefully. However, its full reliability is not assured as this is the first information recorded by teachers using the new process.

Senior leaders helpfully provided this assessment information to teachers to help them plan the right learning for their new classes. However, inspectors found that, in most of the lessons seen, the teaching and work set were either too easy or too hard for the class. As a result, pupils are not being challenged or supported well enough to make the accelerated progress they need. In some classes, pupils have recorded insufficient work in their exercise books since the start of the term.

The quality of teaching

School leaders did not take effective action to track more-able pupils' learning until too late in the summer term. Soon after the academy became involved, an appropriate teacher was assigned to lead this work. Helpful guidance was provided

by a suitably experienced academy colleague and a relevant action plan was drawn up. Appropriate training for teachers was provided about how to identify more-able pupils correctly and effectively promote their progress. However, there was an unacceptable delay in taking this action and, as a result, inspectors saw insufficient evidence of accelerated progress in pupils' books or teaching which challenged these pupils adequately.

Before the involvement of the academy there was inadequate discussion by school leaders with staff about the achievement of average ability pupils. Despite the recent introduction of better systems for checking and recording pupils' progress, teachers remain unclear about who these pupils are, or how to promote their progress so they achieve at the higher levels. Senior leaders and the consultant have not given this aspect sufficient focus in the school's revised improvement plan and inspectors were not able to identify sufficient improvement in this area.

Since the inspection, teachers have taken some action to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their extended writing skills. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy this. A board in the hall now displays pieces of 'best writing', and it is a welcome move that pupils decide for themselves when they have accomplished an even better piece to replace the one on display. Better achievement in writing in Year 6 in 2014 reflects an effective focus on writing in that class last year. Since the inspection the school has taken effective steps to encourage younger pupils to 'see themselves' as writers, with some signs of success. However, there is insufficient evidence in teaching and in pupils' books that teachers across the school give pupils enough opportunities to write freely and at length. Teachers' tendency to break down pupils' writing into pre-prepared sections, or to ask them to write on a pre-set form, often hampers progress.

The school has not taken enough action to provide suitable opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems. Pupils told inspectors that they like their learning to be 'fun', recalling an activity they enjoyed last Christmas, working out an economical plan for the school festivities. However, pupils were unable to recall other, similar activities, and inspectors saw insufficient evidence of real-life problem solving in last year's mathematics exercise books. Where problem solving was evident in books, this was generally number based and limited to work in the book or on a worksheet. In the Reception environment, meaningful mathematical investigations were limited and, in those that were available, the challenge of the activity did not link sufficiently well to the current focus for mathematics teaching.

Before the involvement of the academy, school leaders took some action to promote the effective marking of pupils' work, although this lacked focus and drive. Since the involvement of the academy, school leaders have insisted that teachers' marking aids pupils' progress, and that pupils are given time to think about the feedback and to respond to it in an appropriate way. In the summer term, the school's marking

policy was helpfully made clearer, including appropriate expectations for pupils' responses. Pupils' exercise books show that teachers are now implementing these expectations more consistently, and pupils told inspectors that they look forward to reading their teachers' comments.

In some classes, teachers' comments are considered and helpful, and pupils understand that a thoughtful response is required, together with some positive action. In a Year 6 lesson, one pupil was heard by inspectors to tell another insistently, 'You're not allowed to just write thank you.' Some Year 4 pupils have already replied to their teacher's helpful feedback in their books by carefully writing relevant remarks, such as, 'OK, I will do this next time.' 'I will try.' 'It was hard but I got it.' However, in some other classes, teachers lavish praise on work that is of a low quality and fail to set out clearly enough the pupil's next steps. Some pupils told inspectors they cannot always read their teacher's comments. Had leaders taken firm action sooner, this vital work would now be more consistently applied.

After the section 5 inspection, senior leaders' action to ensure good teaching for all pupils proved ineffective. However, there were some exceptions and, during the summer term, teaching in the Reception Class improved and pupils' work from this time shows better progress, particularly for more-able pupils in their writing. In one case, a child moved on in a relatively short period from hardly being able to make marks with a pencil to writing sentences. Sadly, this quality of teaching and rate of progress in Reception were not evident during this inspection, when examples were seen of adults missing valuable opportunities to take children's writing forward. As a result, there is a risk that standards in Reception will not recover this year.

Inspectors saw inadequate teaching in a number of classes, especially when pupils could not learn because the level of the lesson was set too high or too low. Too often teachers failed to recognise this or adjust their teaching appropriately, and inadequate progress was made. This is not universal, however, and in one very successful lesson, about play scripts, the teacher knew the pupils' stages of learning and planned activities at the right levels.

Senior leaders rightly want to improve the impact of teaching assistants. Although this work has had more impetus since the academy consultant started, most of the teaching assistance observed was ineffective. At times, some teaching assistants were unoccupied. On other occasions their interaction with pupils was ineffective. Overall, teaching assistants are not making enough difference to pupils' learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy coming to school, they like and appreciate their teachers, and want to be successful. They are helpful and polite to visitors, and proud of their school. However, pupils find it difficult to behave well when teaching and the work set are not at the right level for them. On occasions, inspectors observed pupils chatting,

doing nothing, yawning or fidgeting. Because they have not acquired the necessary skills and knowledge in earlier years, some Key Stage 2 pupils lack the confidence or resilience they need to tackle challenging work, especially in mathematics, and they give up or do not bother to start. These factors slow pupils' progress and are not a positive sign at the start of the year.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders did not do enough to improve the school before, or immediately after, the first monitoring inspection in April. Since the involvement of the academy, the impact of leaders has improved, although its effects are limited by the short period involved.

Subject leaders now have access to better information about pupils' progress. They have started to look at pupils' work and teachers' planning, and to consider the needs of more-able pupils. However these developments are very recent, and their limited skills and experience mean that these leaders are not yet making enough difference to the learning and progress of pupils or to the development of staff.

From September, a suitable person has been assigned the full role of special educational needs coordinator and they have already devised a purposeful action plan for the year ahead. This resolves the unsatisfactory situation, which leaders and governors allowed to continue for too long, where these responsibilities were not all undertaken by a qualified teacher.

The way leaders check the quality of teaching for its impact on pupils' learning has improved significantly since the involvement of the academy. Senior leaders took some earlier action, but this was not systematic or regular. Senior leaders now visit lessons, look at pupils' work, talk with pupils and consider teachers' assessment records, before discussing with teachers the strengths and areas for development. However, this has only been in place for a short time and, in attempting to cover all staff, feedback is often too brief and lacks the detail needed to ensure improvement. Furthermore, verbal feedback to teachers does not include enough meaningful discussion. There is too little focus on the improvements called for in the section 5 report, so progress is too slow and additional weaknesses in teaching are emerging.

The academy consultant re-drafted the school's improvement plan in response to the first monitoring visit. Her Majesty's Inspector accepted the revised version as an interim document for the summer term, while advising that it did not adequately address all the areas for improvement and would need further work before the start of the new school year. A revised plan was shared by the school during the inspection. However, the new version still does not focus sharply enough on all the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection report, nor does it outline practical steps to be taken in each area. As a result, the document is not fit

for the purpose of leading the considered and strategic improvement which is required.

The consultant and senior leaders' evaluations of the school's recent improvement are over optimistic. Furthermore, the school's recent self-evaluation of its wider effectiveness is also over generous. This is because, in their evaluation, leaders have credited the valuable activity in the later part of the summer term, without considering whether this has improved pupils' learning. Leaders have also overlooked the decline in pupil outcomes for Reception and Year 2 in 2014. As a result, the school is more confident about its progress than is justified.

The school's child protection policy is out of date, including the designation of a suitable lead person for safeguarding. The policy about contacting parents when pupils are absent is unclear, as is the school's expected approach when a pupil has left the school but is not yet enrolled at another school. The case study of a vulnerable pupil, which was shared with inspectors, did not refer to the pupil's learning or achievement, as it should. Information for parents on the school website is generally out of date, and the information given about special educational needs does not meet all statutory requirements. These weaknesses in the routine leadership of the school reflect poorly on its overall effectiveness.

The governing body has wisely reconstituted and re-arranged its committee structure to increase efficiency. Now, when governors visit the school, they helpfully focus on the areas for improvement in the section 5 report, sharing their findings in later governors' meetings. Governors have agreed with the academy consultant how they will receive information about pupils' progress and they appreciate the importance of using this to measure improvement in the school. However, the full governing body is not kept well enough informed about the work of the committee which checks improvement, and records of meetings do not record in sufficient detail the questions governors ask of school leaders and the answers they receive.

Governors do not have effective arrangements in place to provide external validation for the information they receive from school leaders about pupils' progress or about the quality of teaching. Governors have not made suitable arrangements for the induction or performance management of the acting headteacher. Discussions about the school joining The Village Academy continue between governors, the Academy Board, the Department for Education and the local authority.

External support

After the first monitoring inspection, the local authority commissioned the support of The Village Academy, and revised the statement of action to reflect this. A senior local authority adviser has visited the school to evaluate progress. However, suitably detailed reports of these visits have not been provided, and there is no evidence of the adviser challenging the school's generous self-evaluations in the summer term,

despite the decline in pupils' achievement in Year 2 and Reception. Furthermore, the termly meeting, chaired by the Director of Education and including a group of officers to discuss progress in the school, and planned in the statement of action, has not been convened. As a result, the local authority has not provided the external scrutiny and validation which it committed to deliver. The local authority did not discuss induction arrangements with the acting headteacher, either after her appointment or at the start of term.

During the summer term, the academy consultant led a range of urgent action to increase the rate of improvement in the school. However, it was clear during the monitoring inspection that, due to the short period involved, the impact is limited and work is not always tailored to the precise needs of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching in Reception so that all children are properly prepared for learning in Year 1.
- Improve teaching in Key Stage 1 so that all pupils make good progress and attain at least the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2.