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Mr L Atkinson
The Acting Headteacher
Peasmarsh Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Peasmarsh
Rye
TN31 6UW

Dear Mr Atkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Peasmarsh Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 November 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 December 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 Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, so that it is consistently good and raises pupils' achievement substantially and rapidly, by ensuring that:
 - teachers set pupils appropriate targets in reading, writing and mathematics that indicate clearly what they need to do to improve
 - work is precisely matched to the needs of individual and groups of pupils so that all are engaged by tasks that are at the right level for them
 - all marking is used to indicate clearly what pupils can do and what they need to do next and that teachers check that pupils act on their guidance
 - teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and use this to ensure there are no gaps in pupils' understanding which impede progress
 - pupils develop a secure understanding of basic number facts which they can use to check their answers and move on swiftly in their work.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, in order for them to improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - taking rapid action to tackle underachievement
 - evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately, identifying what the school does well and where it needs to improve, based on realistic information about pupils' achievement and teachers' practice
 - producing improvement plans that are focused and contain measurable steps that will begin to have an impact on pupils' outcomes immediately
 - checking the quality of teaching carefully and regularly, giving teachers specific and helpful feedback and providing appropriate training opportunities so that teachers can improve their practice
 - setting teachers measurable targets, based on pupils' achievement, that identify clearly priorities for improving their performance and provide appropriate and effective training in order to ensure targets are met
 - providing teachers with appropriate support to enable them to develop key skills and secure good subject knowledge
 - ensuring governors hold the school robustly to account.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 November 2014

Evidence

Similarly to the last monitoring inspection, HMI met with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher, members of staff, pupils, parents, governors and a representative of the local authority. He observed several lessons, some jointly with senior staff, and looked at pupils' work. He evaluated key school documents, such as the improvement plan, data about how much progress the pupils have made and minutes of meetings. There remain 13 responses from parents about the school on Parent View, on the Ofsted website.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the substantive headteacher has formally left the school, after a period of sickness absence. The acting headteacher, who, like the executive headteacher, is employed by the Rye Academy Trust, is committed to the post for this academic year at least.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils are achieving better. Last year's Year 6 cohort performed acceptably in their national assessments. Almost all achieved the expected standards, and made the expected progress, in both English and mathematics, with a high proportion doing better than this, especially in reading. Too few pupils, however, reached the higher levels in mathematics. While rightly pleased with these overall improvements, the school is aware that more is possible. For instance, no pupils were ready to take the Level 6 papers in either subject. The current Year 5 and Year 6 pupils are demonstrating skills in writing at about an average standard overall. They could do better than this, and the school is taking thoughtful action to improve their work.

In Key Stage 1, pupils achieved at about an average level in the national assessments, although too few pupils achieved the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics. In the phonics screening test for Years 1 and 2, which tests how well pupils link letters and sounds, pupils did not all do as well as they should, and the outcomes were below average. In particular, pupils did not show sufficient competence in the more complex phonics patterns, such as two and three letter combinations. Rightly, the school has rearranged its approach to phonics teaching in the light of this. HMI will review this at the next monitoring visit.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children generally performed well in their profile assessments, although their early writing was a weaker area. The school recognises how important it is that the current Year 1 cohort does better in this aspect this year. The current Reception age pupils have settled well. They work well independently and, indeed, this independence and resourcefulness are very well established amongst pupils right across the school.

Recognising the fact that pupils' achievement in mathematics is not improving as rapidly as that in English, the school sensibly introduced, and has developed the use of, a new mathematics scheme. This continues to provide a helpful structure and ensures that expectations of pupils are rising. Pupils are now able to work more self-sufficiently and productively, using the scheme's structure for themselves. Their work, as observed by HMI, across the school, was of a reasonable standard. In some cases, however, pupils (of all ability levels) who are ready for some harder work are not given it quickly enough and so their progress is not as rapid as it could be.

Pupils' achievement in the foundation subjects, beyond English and mathematics, shows improvement, but remains patchy, as the school is aware. Pupils say they particularly enjoy art and their topic work on subjects such as the planets and Ancient Egyptians. The parents who met with HMI were understandably pleased about this. However, much of the work in these subjects, whilst interesting, is not yet in sufficient depth, as teachers need to develop their subject knowledge and leadership responsibilities. Nor are units of work linked well enough together so that pupils develop their skills and knowledge in a coherent and structured way.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to improve. Parents and pupils clearly notice this. There are now many consistent strengths in lessons across the school, including:

- the clarity of explanations by teachers and teaching assistants
- good pace in teaching
- careful checks on how well pupils are learning, which are becoming increasingly effective
- positive relationships between adults and pupils
- helpful feedback to pupils and marking of their work.

The key weaknesses that remain in the teaching are to do with the expectations of staff which are not always high enough. Despite improvement, pupils are not consistently given work that challenges them enough. The pupils themselves, along with school leaders, recognise that too often work is too easy for them. Although not as prevalent as it was, in mathematics, pupils are still sometimes required to do too many repetitive sums which do not move their learning forward quickly enough. Although pupils' work in English and mathematics is accurately assessed and recorded by staff and recorded, these assessments are not sufficiently well used to provide challenging work in all lessons.

Teaching assistants show strong skills in questioning, instructing and supporting pupils. Lesson plans, prepared by teachers, show clearly what teaching assistants need to do, and the assistants carry out their work assiduously.

Pupils continue to learn in a pleasant, well-resourced and stimulating environment, which is improving further. Classroom and corridor displays are very attractive and still provide useful information and searching questions for pupils to think about. The outdoor area for the Reception and Year 1 class is much improved. Playgrounds and

other outdoor spaces are increasingly well zoned and organised, so that pupils can enjoy purposeful activity and play. The expected development of a large Forest School area within the grounds has the potential to be a wonderful resource.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning continue to be a real strength of the school. Pupils behave attentively and calmly in lessons and this is well managed by staff. They work independently and productively, even without immediate adult supervision, and are supportive of, and kind to, each other. There are still, however, just occasional examples of their attention wandering, especially when teachers talk to the whole class but without sufficiently engaging all groups of pupils.

Attendance rates continue to be above average. Pupils say they enjoy school and feel very safe there. They want to succeed. There is little evidence of any bullying. Pupils have increasingly good opportunities to take responsibility. For example, the school council meets regularly and is developing its responsibilities. Year 6 pupils now each have a 'buddy' in the Reception class, to mutual benefit.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and executive headteacher continue to lead ambitiously and very well. They balance the rightly increasing expectations of the staff with strong support and training. They listen, learn and direct, in just the right balance. Consequently, staff feel well motivated, secure and determined to bring about the necessary improvements. Parents and the community are absolutely delighted with the availability of, and the direction provided by, the acting headteacher.

Senior staff evaluate the school accurately and keep useful and well organised evidence of the school's progress. Data showing how well pupils are progressing are particularly accessible and well organised. The school improvement plan continues to be an effective and well-used document, bringing evident clear improvements. Performance management for staff is properly established. However, governors do not contribute to the acting headteacher's performance management, as this is carried out by the Rye Academy Trust. All involved agree that they should do so.

Senior leaders continue to build very worthwhile informal links with other local schools. There is useful sharing of ideas and mutual support with moderation of assessments of pupils' work, for example.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs, and for those entitled to pupil premium funding, is appropriately managed. There are few notable gaps between the achievement of these pupils and the others. The school does not yet, however, evaluate well enough the impact of the sport funding it receives on pupils' activity, nor report this on its (much improved) website.

Middle leadership, of all the subjects, is shared between only a few members staff in this small school. Staff continue to work hard, supportively, and enthusiastically at

these responsibilities and each subject has a reasonable action plan. Staff have useful opportunities to experiment and reflect on their practice. However, despite clear improvement, there is much more to do before the curriculum and teaching in all subjects are of the desired standard.

This leads to a key reason why the school, despite its clear improvement, is not yet ready to leave special measures. At present, the strategic plans for the school's future are not stable enough. Key decisions, involving governors, the diocese and the local authority amongst others, about possible academisation and/or more formally federated work with other local schools are not yet taken. With this uncertainty, it is not possible for the school to plan with sufficient certainty how to improve further its own leadership, curriculum and teaching and how this work might be shared with other schools. Thus, the school is in a state of limbo. Although such strategic decisions should not be rushed, nor can they be delayed for too long. It is unlikely to be possible to consider the school's removal from special measures until these plans are clearly set out.

The governing body continues to develop its work effectively. The Chair, who leads well, is very aware of the difficulties caused by the current delays in organising the long-term local strategic arrangements. Governors ask suitably demanding questions of school leaders, which are well recorded in their minutes. This effectively encourages improvement. However, in respect of teaching and the curriculum, these questions are unduly limited to English and mathematics and should extend more broadly. The governing body has, amongst its membership, committed people with a wide range of skills and experience. It has recruited sensibly, with members receiving useful training, although there remains a parent governor vacancy.

External support

The local authority and Rye Academy Trust both provide very valuable and well dovetailed support. The local authority has improved its arrangements for ensuring that no planned actions are forgotten or allowed to slip. Its advice, in a number of different areas, is valued by the school. Both the local authority and the Rye Academy Trust understand clearly the importance of settling the long-term strategic arrangements for the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Set out a clear plan or 'roadmap' for the school's future strategic organisation, whether as an academy or otherwise.
- Continue to raise teachers' expectations of the pupils.