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29 January 2015

Joanna DiBella  
Executive Headteacher  
Hormead Church of England (VA) First School  
Great Hormead  
Buntingford  
Hertfordshire  
SG9 0NR

Dear Mrs DiBella

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Hormead Church of England (VA) First School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2015, 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 January 2014. 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 appoint one newly qualified teacher for Key Stage 1 with a contract starting in September 2015.

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 Hertfordshire and the Diocese of St Albans.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014.**

- Improve the quality of teaching to good and better by:
  - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length
  - ensuring that all pupils are interested and involved by making sure that the work they are doing is not too easy
  - correcting errors in pupils' work and checking that they follow the advice they are given through teachers' marking.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels within the school by:
  - making sure that all leaders have the necessary skills to hold staff to account and know what needs to be improved to bring about rapid pupil progress in their areas of responsibility
  - making sure that the recent marking policy is used consistently across all classes
  - strengthening links with parents to ensure that they are all confident in the school's ability to provide the best education for their children.

Ofsted has made recommendations on actions for governance to the authority responsible for the school. This will include an external review of governance. An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 28 January 2015**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed teaching in all classes jointly with the headteacher, scrutinised pupils' written work, checked arrangements for the safe recruitment and vetting of staff and took into account data on pupils' achievement, the school's plans for improvement and self-evaluation. She met with the headteacher, the special needs coordinator, two members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

### **Context**

The governing body is still seeking to finalise arrangements for the school's future leadership on a permanent basis. A new temporary executive headteacher, is on loan three days a week from a good school within the local authority, until July 2015. The number of pupils on roll has dropped from 44 at the last inspection to 33.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Pupils' achievement continues to improve, particularly in the quality of their written work in English and their knowledge, understanding and skills in using phonics (letters and the sounds they make) for reading and spelling. The very large majority of pupils are making at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Many are making more progress than this which is helping to close the gap in their attainment so that it is moving ever closer to reaching the expectations for their ages.

The quality of writing in English is notably of better than seen previously, with pupils applying what they are learning about spelling, punctuation and grammar in written tasks. Even so, the amount of written work completed in individual lessons is disappointing. Written work in subjects other than English does not reflect the quality of that seen in pupils' English books. Across the school pupils are acquiring phonics skills progressively. For example, the youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are developing proficiency in recognising initial letter sounds and are learning to blend two sounds together. Pupils in Key Stage 1 use phonics break down words into separate sounds which helps them to tackle new and unfamiliar words in reading or to build words in their writing. In Key Stage 2, improvements in the way pupils develop their phonic knowledge is helping them to improve the

accuracy of their spelling. Handwriting in all classes is improving, with better care and attention being paid to letter formation and general neatness.

Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs have started to make more consistent progress because the work they are given meets their needs more suitably. Likewise, the most able pupils are rising to the challenge of more demanding work. The level of difficulty, while higher than it was previously, still does not stretch some of them as far as it could.

### **The quality of teaching**

The determination of teaching staff to develop and improve their practice is strong and, consequently, the rate of pupils' progress is accelerating. They welcome advice and feedback from professionals who observe their teaching and, importantly, they act upon it. The quality of teachers' marking has improved significantly. The marking policy is implemented consistently in all year groups and subjects, giving pupils helpful feedback in what they need to do to improve. In response, pupils are beginning to show in their corrections that they have taken this advice on board. Some pupils, however, are inclined to forget the points for improvement in future work and repeat mistakes.

Teachers are planning pupils' work with their different needs and abilities in mind. They check to see what pupils already know and can do and base the next steps on their previous learning. A useful example of this was observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children's progress is assessed and then illustrated and documented in their learning journeys (examples of children's work stored in a book with the teacher's notes about what they have achieved). Their achievements in each area of learning and what they need to learn next are displayed on a notice board in the classroom and updated every week. In this way, teaching staff and parents are clear about individual children's achievements.

Sometimes teachers' eagerness for pupils to 'get things right' results in too much help being offered to complete an activity and this slows their progress. Following the teachers' clear instructions and guidance pupils do not always have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt uninterrupted. This reduces the amount of work that pupils are able to get through in each session. Teaching staff are not always watching carefully enough to judge when to step in to prevent pupils from floundering and when it is beneficial to allow pupils to work things out for themselves.

Classrooms are generally welcoming, well-organised and inspiring places for learning. Displays are eye catching and particularly effective in Key Stage 2. Here, pupils have ample opportunities to contribute their views and comments. For example, pupils read non-fiction books on display and added post-it notes to the text

to highlight the key features of factual information. In the Early Years Foundation Stage there are not enough examples of children's work on display.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils are much more engaged with their learning because the curriculum is more interesting and teaching staff are using more effective methods and approaches to keep learning fresh and exciting. Pupils' behaviour for learning has improved significantly. Nonetheless, they are not developing resilience and perseverance in their learning sufficiently and are overly reliant on adult support. This means they are not wholly prepared for their move to the middle school and the next stage in their education. Pupils benefit from a range of good resources to support their learning and show independence in retrieving them for themselves. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage waste no time in getting ready for activities and clearing away their toys. They know the routines and follow the rules. There is no fuss or loss of learning time when pupils move from one activity to another because behaviour is good and pupils follow their teachers' instructions willingly. The school provides a safe place for pupils to learn. Staff and pupils alike are safety-conscious and the school's work to keep them safe is secure.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The governing body, supported by the local authority, has made suitable temporary arrangements for leadership at headship level. Careful monitoring of teaching and learning has been continuous and the impact of this work is showing in the improvement in teaching and pupils' achievement. Systems and procedures to support school improvement work are effective. They provide a secure basis for the current executive headteacher's focus on coaching and supporting teachers to raise their expectations of their pupils' achievement and bring about more rapid pupil progress.

The special needs coordinator has contributed to the improvements made in the achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. For example, each pupil on the special needs register has had the opportunity to explain what methods of teaching suit them best and how the school could make things even better for them. This has been informative and has given the teaching staff insight into what to put in place to meet their needs more accurately.

Governors have continued to strengthen their effectiveness through their positive response to the external review of governance. Governors know the school and its

strengths and weaknesses. They are familiar with the achievement of all groups of pupils and their readiness to question and challenge has grown. They are ambitious for the school and are working effectively to ensure it continues to improve. Work to advertise the school locally to recruit new families has been relentless. Parents are aware of the school's progress. However, they have not been encouraged to register their views about the school on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Consequently, new families seeking a place for their children do not know how satisfied other parents are with the quality of provision.

With no sign of permanent appointments for the headship the school's capacity to sustain the favourable improvements already made hangs in the balance.

Discussions are ongoing but the Diocese, the local authority and the governing body have not agreed a suitable way forward.

### **External support**

The local authority provides the school with adequate support. It updates its suitable statement of action regularly to reflect the stage the school is at in its journey out of special measures. It has commissioned a series of executive headteachers to lead the school temporarily but has not yet secured a permanent headteacher to lead the school. This means the school's capacity for further improvement beyond July 2015 is unclear. Staff benefit from valuable support from professionals in other local schools. This has been useful in helping them to improve their practice. For example, the current executive headteacher is using good examples of pupils' work from her school to raise teachers' expectations for Hormead pupils' achievement.