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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 with Linda Bartlett Additional Inspector to your school on 4–5 February 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection, which took place in May 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 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 Diocese, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley.

Yours sincerely
Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection, which took place in May 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to consistently good or better by:
 - eradicating all inadequate teaching
 - making sure that teachers in Years 1 to 4 have the knowledge to assess pupils' skills and understanding accurately
 - ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - providing training to improve the quality of the teaching of phonics and mathematics

- Raise achievement and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics, by making sure that teachers:
 - have accurate information about what pupils can do and use it to plan effectively the next steps in pupils' learning
 - allow pupils time to extend their learning and deepen their thinking
 - provide regular opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematics skills in other subjects.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders check regularly that teaching results in pupils making better progress
 - teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and reflect the work in their books
 - actions and ways of measuring success in the school's improvement plans are focused on improving pupils' achievement
 - leaders who have a subject or key stage responsibility contribute to improvements in teaching and learning.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. They also met with subject leaders for phonics (the sounds that letters make), English and mathematics and spoke with the leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage and special educational needs. Inspectors listened to some pupils read and looked at the work in pupils' books. Informal discussions took place with pupils and staff. Inspectors also met with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor and with two representatives of the local authority.

Context

Three members of staff left at the end of the autumn term. Other members of staff are currently covering responsibilities across school on a temporary basis. The business manager also left at the end of the autumn term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There are early signs of recovery in some areas. For example, in 2014, the proportion of pupils who reached a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage rose to 38%. Although this is well below the achievement of children in other schools nationally, it is a significant improvement on previous years. Information about children currently in Reception class indicates that the improving trend is continuing.

Pupils' skills in phonics have improved since my previous visit. Results in the phonic reading check for pupils in Year 1 in 2014, although below average, were an improvement on the very low scores gained in 2013.

However, because of continued weaknesses in teaching, pupils' achievement has declined further in some areas since the inspection in May 2014, particularly in the national end of key stage tests with pupils around 18 months behind other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Disadvantaged pupils continue to attain less well than their classmates and other pupils nationally in all subjects, although the gap is narrowing within school. The school now has better systems in place to identify and support those pupils who need extra help such as those who are disabled or have special educational needs. These systems are too new to have had any discernible impact on their progress or attainment, which is currently inadequate.

Attainment in writing remains low across the school. This is partly because not all teachers use the correct grammatical terms when teaching writing, preferring to use non-specific terms or a formulaic method for constructing sentences, for example insisting that pupils use two adjectives before every noun. This prevents pupils being able to use language well. Teachers focus too much on ensuring that pupils know the structures of different types of writing and pay too little attention to developing their technical accuracy or helping pupils write with flair and confidence.

There is still a great deal of ground to make up. Pupils in all year groups have considerable gaps to close to make up for previous underachievement in reading. This is because reading is not taught systematically or regularly enough. Pupils read few books and do not read often enough to an adult. Evidence from pupils' reading records show that few pupils are heard to read on regular basis by an adult in school. Some pupils have not read since July 2014 – this is unacceptable.

The quality of teaching

Because of effective training and better teaching pupils are becoming confident and successful in using their phonic knowledge to work out unknown words. Observation of phonics lessons and assessment information show that an increasing proportion of pupils are on track to reach the standard expected for their age in phonics by the end of Year 1.

The teaching of other aspects of reading is inadequate. Teachers' subject knowledge is weak. Assessment of pupils' ability to read is inaccurate and unreliable because there is no clear baseline of pupils' skills in reading. Teachers do not oversee the books pupils read or plan reading lessons well enough.

The school sets aside 45 minutes each day for reading but this time is poorly used. Pupils spend most of the reading session carrying out mundane activities that do not develop their reading skills, some pupils are merely asked to draw a picture or find six words in a text. Consequently, pupils' work currently does not provide sufficient evidence to support teachers' judgement about pupils' attainment and progress.

There is some teaching that is resulting in pupils catching up on lost time. Children make good progress in mathematics in Reception but this is not mirrored in Key Stages 1 and 2 where there remain weaknesses in teaching. Although, pupils' books show that they are covering a wider range of mathematics topics and producing more work in lessons, there is little evidence of pupils being able to explain their thinking or answer questions which require them to show that they have a deep understanding of the concept being taught.

In most year groups, there is little challenge for the most-able pupils. For example, where pupils are set a series of word problems or calculations, all the questions are same type, but with slightly larger numbers according to the ability of the group.

Most of the tasks set or questions asked do not help to develop pupils' mathematical reasoning. For instance, there are few examples of questions asking what if? or explain why this does not work, or what do you notice? When such problems are set pupils become frustrated very quickly because they do not have the depth of understanding or skills required to solve the problem.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of behaviour logs show that there are pockets of persistent low-level disruption. Inspectors observed several instances of pupils swinging on chairs, pushing other pupils and calling out. Often, pupils do not settle and or get on with work without fussing or seeking adult help. The teaching observed and tasks set did not help pupils to develop good habits of learning because pupils became bored very easily.

The school has continued the extended use of part-time timetables for some pupils as a means of managing behaviour. This is completely unacceptable, as I pointed out in my last report. It does not fit with government guidance and constitutes a potential safeguarding issue.

Attendance is not checked well enough. Poor record keeping and the lack of oversight of this important area could also be a safeguarding concern given that the school has a high proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. Calls made to parents on the first day of a child's absence are not recorded in sufficient detail and there is little evidence of any follow-up.

Similarly, behaviour records are not routinely checked and so leaders do not have a clear overview of what behaviour is like across the school. Incidents are recorded in many different ways and places, for example, warning logs kept in classrooms, separate bullying logs kept in classrooms.

Some of the safeguarding issues identified during my previous visit have been rectified and now meet the requirements in force at the time of the inspection. The policies for child protection and safeguarding are thorough. Training and other policies such as attendance, anti-bullying are up to date and meet requirements. A further scrutiny of staff files shows that references are still not always kept on file and some files do not provide all the information required on identity.

Records of actions taken to protect pupils potentially at risk of harm are now collated and they show that referrals are made in a timely manner.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership and management are improving but very slowly. Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher has rightly focused on reorganising the

leadership roles across the school, improving the teaching of phonics and making sure that safeguarding procedures meet current legal requirements.

Leadership is not improving more rapidly because many leaders are new to their role or looking after a subject on a temporary basis. Most have not received sufficient support or training to carry out their roles effectively. The checking of other teachers' work does not concentrate well enough on how well pupils are learning and making progress. Poor practice, particularly in reading goes unchallenged. Some senior leaders are not strategic enough in their work. For example, they have identified many improvement activities, not all of which are helpful in making teaching better. Importantly, senior leaders' assessment of their impact on making improvements is over generous, for instance their judgement of the quality of teaching over time, particularly in reading, is too positive because it is not focused on an accurate or reliable assessment of pupils' progress from their starting points in previous key stages.

There is increasing precision in the analysis of pupils' work but findings are still not used well enough to improve teaching, particularly in the teaching of reading. Here, work in pupils' books does not match the teachers' assessment of their attainment and progress. The picture in mathematics and writing is marginally better but still requires significant improvement.

In contrast, the leadership of phonics, the Early Years Foundation Stage and special educational needs, continue to improve. The leader of phonics has ensured that staff teaching phonics attend training and she monitors their practice on a weekly basis. All staff have a fortnightly coaching session to help improve their practice where monitoring has identified areas for improvement.

The governing body has a clear understanding that significant improvements are still required. Governors are well aware that teaching must improve in order that all pupils can achieve well. Minutes from their meetings show that governors ask questions to challenge leaders to do better and are rightly requesting information about the impact of leaders' actions and the improvements being made to teaching. They are also aware that information on pupils' attainment and progress contain errors and therefore do not present a reliable or accurate picture from which to judge improvement. The governors and the officers of the diocese are aware that the lack of permanent staff is preventing leadership and teaching from improving more quickly.

Governors are at the very early stages of consulting with number of interested parties with the view of becoming an academy.

External support

A local authority officer and a deputy headteacher from another school provide support for mathematics and reading. This is a positive development with training provided which allows staff to improve their practice. However, the impact of this support has been limited because some leaders and staff have not made best use of the advice given. Caution needs to be exercised about how and when the advice is provided in the future as some leaders are not fully able to implement the required changes and this has the potential for confusion among staff.

A local authority officer attends the governors' Ofsted improvement committee meetings and has conducted two local authority reviews of the school. She has an accurate picture of the school's progress.

If the school is to make rapid improvement extensive external support is required for the senior leadership team.