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Christopher Errington
Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Hazel Grove
Bedworth
CV12 9DA

Dear Mr Errington

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Christopher Mansell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12–13 May 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 enough progress towards the removal of special measures

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection

I strongly recommend that the proposed academy, due to open on 1 July 2015, does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Warwickshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - there are high expectations of pupils
 - gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are identified and action is taken to close them
 - pupils understand the next steps they need to take in their learning
 - questioning enables pupils to think more deeply.
- Ensure that the progress of boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics is consistently good or better by:
 - making phonics sessions more demanding so pupils acquire these skill more rapidly
 - improving the quality of pupils' handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - increasing the importance and impact of homework throughout the school.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - improving the rigour with which school leaders hold teachers responsible for the progress pupils make
 - improving governors' and all staff's understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that plans for improvement deal with accurately identified weaknesses quickly through clear actions, targets and time frames
 - improving the use of information about pupil progress by teachers and school leaders so that weaknesses are identified more accurately

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 12–13 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other leaders, pupils, the Chair and another member of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, two representatives of the Diocese of Coventry Multi-academy Trust (the MAT) and the consultant headteacher assigned by the MAT to support the school following conversion to academy status. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books, talked to them about their learning and made short visits to lessons.

Context

One teacher has left the school since the previous monitoring inspection. Senior leadership responsibilities have been reassigned and clarified. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and is due to take up his post in September. Interviews are scheduled to recruit permanent teachers to two vacant posts currently being covered by temporary arrangements. One new governor has joined the governing body. The Department for Education has granted an academy order, which means that the school will close at the end of June and reopen on 1 July as an academy within the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The section 5 inspection in January 2013 identified that pupils' progress was too slow in reading and writing. While better in mathematics, it nevertheless required improvement. This difference remains. School data indicate that pupils' progress in reading and writing is still too slow overall. Pupils in some classes appear to be making good progress, but these positive instances are not replicated across the school. Progress overall in mathematics appears stronger but, similarly, inconsistencies remain.

Much work has been done to check out the reliability of teachers' assessment and the headteacher is confident school data indicate a true picture of pupils' attainment and progress. Work in pupils' books indicates that, in some cases, teachers' judgements are still a little overgenerous. Advice given to teachers in the Reception classes about measuring children's progress includes some inaccurate information and has led, in some cases, to inflated judgements.

Targets set for pupils in mathematics do not fully reflect the increased demands of the new National Curriculum. Teachers' assessments are, therefore partly based on the old, less-demanding expectations. Consequently, there is a mismatch between the school's view of achievement in mathematics and the fluency with which pupils are able to use number facts to solve complex mathematical problems.

Pupils' books confirm the school's view that progress in writing remains a key priority. However, the school's data does not take enough account of the realities of the work in books, which shows wide variation across the school. Some pupils make rapid progress in writing, but many, particularly in Key Stage 2, are making little progress and the quality of their work remains poor. For example, one book in upper Key Stage 2 contained several examples of grammatically incorrect sentences that had not been picked up by the teacher. Pupils' writing books show that previously identified issues with poor presentation remain.

The school has taken steps to improve the profile of reading. Pupils value the attractive library and interesting reading areas in some classrooms. Reading is becoming more popular. Evidence was not gathered during this inspection to determine the accuracy of the school's assessments of reading.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching still varies widely across the school. There are examples of teaching which promotes excellent learning. These, however, are rare. More typically, teaching leads to steady progress in mathematics and slower progress in writing

Teachers' planning does not enable pupils to gradually build skills in each aspect of mathematics. So, while pupils get better at different mathematical skills, they do not become proficient in using knowledge about numbers to solve problems or to reason mathematically.

In many classes across Years 3 to 6, pupils' work still reflects low expectations. This leads to pupils having low aspirations. Pupils say their teachers expect them to present their work well, but many examples exist where this so-called 'good presentation' still contains untidy handwriting, incorrectly used capital letters, missed punctuation and messy crossings out. This is accepted by some teachers, so these errors persist. When questioned, some pupils could not identify these errors. In one example, the teachers had written that such work was 'well presented'. Some pupils' books are neatly presented, reflecting the teacher's high expectations and pupils' pride in their work. This is particularly so in Key Stage 1 and in one class in lower Key Stage 2.

Several attempts have been made to establish a system for setting personal targets in order to show pupils how well they are doing and what they need to learn next. Nevertheless, the impact of targets remains widely variable. Some teachers, particularly in Year 2 and one class in Year 3, guide pupils skilfully to use targets to help them improve their work. In other classes, targets have little impact. In some classes, teachers have not recorded whether pupils have achieved their targets since

December, so pupils do not know how well they are doing. All pupils spoken to feel they are making good progress, although many of their books show this is not the case.

Similarly, wide variation remains in the quality of teachers' marking. In the Year 2 classes and one class in Year 3, teachers give pupils precise and relevant guidance after each piece of work to help clarify misunderstandings and move learning forward. Pupils in these classes are making swift progress. In other classes, the impact of the teacher's comments is more varied. There are good examples in Years 5 and 6, but basic errors sometimes go unchecked. In other classes in Key Stage 2, marking makes little difference to pupils' progress. Comments are sometimes irrelevant. Where useful advice is given, teachers do not always ensure that this leads to the expected improvement.

The early years provision has undergone much change this year, due to rising numbers and new accommodation. The classrooms are light and airy. However, they are rather dull and uninviting, so do not create an environment where learning is supported, valued or celebrated. The outdoor learning area is under development. It is large and well resourced. However, teachers do not make the most of opportunities to inspire children to practise and apply their reading and writing skills while playing outdoors.

From their assessments of children's skills on starting at the school, teachers in the early years identified mathematics as an area of focus. Their ongoing assessments suggest children are now more confident with recognising numbers to 20, in counting and in performing simple calculations, such as adding eight and two. Teachers plan opportunities for children to acquire and practise writing skills. However, teachers do not ensure that all children access these opportunities enough. Consequently, some children have not made as much progress as they might in using their knowledge of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) to help them write.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, some examples were noted of pupils behaving boisterously. Leaders acted swiftly to address these concerns and, as a result, behaviour has returned to its previously high standards. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. This is because their safety and emotional well-being are taken seriously and effectively provided for.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Pupils' achievement is not improving rapidly enough because teachers are still not held sharply to account for pupils' progress. Conversations about progress take place, but little emphasis is placed on the evidence in pupils' books, which clearly shows that some work is still of poor quality. Even where the school's records show pupils are making slow progress, leaders have not acted quickly enough to tackle weak teaching. Much time and effort is spent providing advice and support for teachers. However, there is little expectation that this will lead to rapid improvement. Leaders place too much emphasis on improving results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 and not enough on ensuring that pupils achieve well throughout the school. Ambitions for individual pupils are too low.

Leaders' responsibilities are now more defined. It is now clear to teachers and leaders who is responsible for checking the quality of teaching and who is available to provide advice on teaching different subjects. Nevertheless, lines of accountability have not led to improvements in some pupils' achievement. This is because weaknesses in teaching are accepted and allowed to persist. In part, this is because leaders' views about what good teaching looks like are based largely upon a checklist of things that teachers should do, not on whether teaching makes enough difference to pupils' achievement. Another factor is that the teachers who have responsibility for different key stages do not have the authority to take the decisive action needed to eradicate inadequate teaching. Senior leaders have this authority but have not acted.

Leaders do now track pupils' progress across the school and carry out some analysis of the relative achievement of different groups. This has helped leaders ask some useful questions about the reasons why some pupils perform better than others. Some key groups are missing from the tracking records, however. This limits the benefit of this analysis. For example, no clear distinction is made between how well disadvantaged pupils achieve compared with other pupils. Therefore, leaders are not able to evaluate the impact of the use of pupil premium funding (extra money from the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority).

The governing body has re-evaluated its effectiveness and taken action to address perceived gaps in skills and systems. For example, governors have plans for a more strategic approach to gathering necessary information from the headteacher and for checking the validity of this information for themselves. These are plans for the future, so there is currently no evidence of them making a difference to pupils' achievement. Governors continue to challenge through meetings and discussions with leaders. Nevertheless, governors' challenge has not led to sufficient improvement. In part, this is because the information provided by leaders paints an

overly positive picture of the school's performance. However, where weaknesses are identified, governors are too willing to accept excuses given for poor performance.

Preparations for the school's transition to academy status are being well managed and clearly communicated. There is a sense of optimism about the future and the benefits of belonging to the multi-academy trust.

External support

The multi-academy trust is working well with the local authority to transfer responsibility for school improvement in advance of the conversion date. This has ensured that the trust has a clear view of what needs to be done and has set appropriate plans in place to drive much more rapid improvement after 1 July. The local authority continues to provide support for aspects of teaching, for checking the accuracy of teachers' assessment and for the early years provision. While it has been welcomed, support has had limited impact on improving the quality of teaching or leadership. Some advice has led to confusion and has perpetuated the school's overly generous view of its effectiveness, such as the guidance given for judging achievement in the early years.