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Mr Lee Regan
Interim Executive Headteacher
Yoxford Primary School
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Dear Mr Regan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Yoxford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8–9 December 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2015. 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2015

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - robust systems are in place to monitor regularly and accurately the quality of learning and teaching, and that specific measurable actions are put in place to tackle all areas that are identified as needing to improve
 - governors are provided with accurate and clear information that allows them to review frequently the impact of planned improvements on the quality of teaching and the progress of all groups of pupils
 - the head of school, teaching staff, teaching assistants and administrative staff are all adequately trained and supported in order to fulfil their roles
 - all teachers are accountable for any practice that does not meet the national teaching standards, and that other staff are accountable once they have been adequately trained in their areas of responsibility
 - teachers understand the specific National Curriculum expectations for all subjects for each year group, and deliver lessons that meet these expectations.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - matching the content of the lesson to the ability and age of pupils within the class
 - marking work so that pupils have a clear understanding of how to improve
 - modelling high expectations for presentation in their teaching, displays and presentation of materials, and support this by making very explicit to pupils what acceptable presentation is
 - allocating teaching assistants to support the learning of different groups in the class, providing them with adequate information to help pupils learn
 - asking pupils probing and challenging questions to clarify their understanding and extend their learning.
- Improve learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - adequately training staff to meet the learning needs of reception-aged children
 - resourcing the provision to meet the areas of learning as outlined in the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - accurately assessing children's learning against the national framework, and use this assessment to plan activities that given children the opportunities to make 'next step' progress.

- Secure pupils' good attitudes and behaviour by:
 - planning and delivering lessons that are interesting and engaging
 - the clear and consistent use of praise and consequences so pupils know what is expected of them
 - supporting pupils to take pride in their achievements
 - encouraging pupils to take responsibility for the quality of their own work, and trying harder to improve.

An external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8–9 December 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive headteacher, other members of staff, the pupils in Key Stage 2, two members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority. Teaching and learning were observed jointly with the interim executive headteacher in all three classes, and the inspector looked at the work in pupils' exercise books. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

The substantive executive headteacher retired at the end of the summer term. An interim executive headteacher joined the school in September and will remain in post until the end of the academic year. A teacher from another school in the federation transferred to Yoxford in September. A teaching and learning lead was appointed for two terms to work across all four schools in the federation. He has since left the school and a new appointee has recently taken up the post. The governing body was disbanded at the end of the summer term and an IEB has been in place since July 2015. Discussions are continuing about the future of the school and possibilities for becoming a sponsored academy; no decision has been made and there is no clear way forward at this stage.

Outcomes for pupils

The small number of pupils in each year group means that it is difficult to report on statutory assessment information in any detail without risk of identifying individual pupils. However, overall, attainment was well below the national average at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2015. Similarly, the progress pupils made between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 was well below average.

The school considers internal assessment information from the summer term to be insecure and is, therefore, unable to provide reliable data on the progress pupils are currently making. However, a new assessment system is now fully in place and a firm baseline has been established for the school to measure progress against. By the end of this term, a second round of assessment information will have been added to the school's tracking system and information on pupils' progress will become available. The school's assessment information shows that attainment remains a cause for concern. In writing, for example, in one year group in Key Stage 2, only 40% of pupils are currently assessed as working at or above age-related expectations.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Initially, the school made a slow start to addressing the weaknesses in teaching identified by the section 5 inspection in April 2015. However, since September the focus on improving the quality of teaching has increased and effective action is now being taken. The interim executive headteacher has taken prompt action to address the weakest teaching and there are early signs that the overall quality of teaching in the school is starting to improve.

The increased emphasis on working together as a federation is benefiting the school. There has been a great deal of work in developing and improving teachers' planning and this is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching. Staff from all four of the federation schools meet regularly to plan teaching for their common year groups (for example, all early years teaching staff meet to plan the early years curriculum). The school's leaders report that this approach is developing well, raising teachers' confidence and improving the overall quality of teaching.

There is evidence that the federation-wide focus on improving marking is beginning to have an impact. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and frequently add 'next steps' to show pupils how to improve their work. However, the improvements in marking are not yet having the desired impact on pupils' progress because teachers do not always choose the most appropriate areas for pupils to focus on or give them time to address the issues raised.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes to learning are starting to improve. 'Headteacher's awards' have been introduced to recognise pieces of work that show particularly good effort or improvement. These are valued by pupils and there is clear evidence that they are being used regularly to motivate and reward.

However, the quality of pupils' work remains variable and too much appears scruffy and uncared for. Too often, teachers do not model good handwriting and presentation when marking pupils' work. Pupils are not set high enough expectations for their own work and, as a result, work is often untidy and handwriting is frequently immature or poorly formed. The interim executive headteacher is aware of this issue and plans are in place to address it.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim executive headteacher has had a clear impact on improving the school since he joined the federation in September. There is little evidence of effective

action being taken to address the issues identified at the section 5 inspection prior to the start of the new academic year. The interim executive headteacher is ambitious for the school and the federation. He already knows the school well and has taken firm and decisive action to tackle the most important weaknesses.

The federation has a new website in place. This is developing well and provides an increasingly useful range of information for parents about the federation as a whole and Yoxford specifically. The safeguarding section on the website provides clear and obvious information for the general public on how they should report child protection concerns should they ever arise. This information is given in a particularly 'upfront' and accessible way and is an example of good practice.

The school's action plan addresses all the key actions from the section 5 inspection. It includes a good range of suitable actions and it is clear how the plan's progress will be checked and monitored. Some milestones are not as specific as they could be and it would be useful for the plan to show the entirety of the school's intended journey out of special measures, even in outline form.

The IEB is now well established and is working well as an effective team. The members of the IEB know the school and the federation well, and have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. The members of the IEB demonstrate high expectations for the school and are clearly focused on ensuring swift and effective school improvement.

Following the appointment of an IEB, an external review of governance is no longer necessary. A review of the school's use of the pupil premium has not yet taken place but the school has identified its preferred reviewer and is currently finalising arrangements for a review to take place early in the spring term.

External support

The local authority's statement of action complies with requirements. The local authority is providing a good range of suitable support to the school. The regular visits from a standards and excellence officer are helpful and the focus on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils is appropriate. It is important that the officer also uses these visits as an opportunity to monitor the statement of action to ensure that actions are completed on time and that the plan remains on track.