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Julie Puxley and Rachel Callaghan
Acting Headteachers
Debden Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Debden
Saffron Walden
CB11 3LE

Dear Mrs Puxley and Mrs Callaghan

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Debden Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteachers, two governors and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. Visits were made to classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. An extended scrutiny was made of pupils' writing across the school. The school's safeguarding procedures and records were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection, the school's leadership has changed significantly. The headteacher has left the school. Two acting headteachers have been in place since September 2015 and will continue to lead the school until the new headteacher takes up her post in January 2016. The acting headteachers are both headteachers of local schools. The deputy headteacher has stepped down from her position and

has returned to a full-time teaching role. One class teacher has left the school and has been replaced. Another teacher is currently on maternity leave.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's leadership team, including the governing body, have responded quickly to the safeguarding concerns identified at the inspection. Procedures for ensuring that important documentation, such as that associated with child protection, is systematically organised are now in place. Risk assessments are now carried out thoroughly and well in advance of planned trips or events. The way that staff record incidents or accidents, and communicate with parents if necessary, is robust. The school site is much more secure than in the past because perimeter fencing has been installed around the outdoor learning area for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Leaders have coordinated a 'decluttering' of the school's corridors and shared spaces. Teachers and pupils value the improvements that have been achieved in a short space of time. The raised expectations for safeguarding have not impacted on every area of the school at this stage. Two large upright freezers were found to be unlocked, and kitchen cleaning fluids were stored in an unlocked cupboard, within reach of pupils. Both of these issues were addressed during the monitoring inspection but vigilance is required to prevent a reoccurrence.

Plans to improve the quality of pupils' writing are in place. They include training staff and raising expectations of what pupils can achieve. Evidence in many pupils' books shows that the quality of writing in most year groups is below age-related expectations. The quality of pupils' handwriting is a factor in this, as too many pupils do not take care or pride in the way that they present their work. This is especially the case for boys, whose work is noticeably worse than that of girls. This is, however, not the case in Year 6. Here, pupils' work is generally very well presented. It is important that handwriting is improved in all other year groups, in order that pupils leave the school ready for their secondary education.

The school has also acted swiftly to ensure that assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are accurate. Advisers from the local authority have worked with Reception teachers to moderate their assessments. The learning journeys that staff use to record children's progress are improving. Teachers are now looking for opportunities to involve parents in these documents so that key skills, such as reading or counting, can be developed at home at the same time as at school. Written dialogues, such as family traditions at Christmas, are now appearing in children's learning journeys.

A single improvement plan, with realistic time-frames and measurable milestones, is in place. It targets the key areas set out in the inspection and leaders and governors are monitoring it closely. Governors are making visits which specifically check on these key areas. One governor, for example, visited to check on moderation in the Reception class. Another has visited school to speak to pupils to ascertain their understanding of what they need to do to improve their writing, and thereby assess

how well teachers are communicating this to them. Governors have all attended training on safeguarding, and are checking that the school's procedures are effective. Governors and senior leaders have taken a realistic view on ensuring that middle leaders are given more time to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. This work is planned to start when the new headteacher is in post in January 2016.

The local authority has worked effectively to support the school. A new adviser was appointed in September 2015 to work alongside the acting headteachers. Fortnightly visits from this adviser have helped to identify precisely which parts of the school need the most support. Leaders, governors and local authority representatives acknowledge that there is much more to do, but have structured plans for this work. In the meantime, improvements are clearly underway.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie

Her Majesty's Inspector