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Mrs Janet Tringham
Headteacher
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Cordell Road
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Dear Mrs Tringham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Long Melford Church of England VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 January 2016, 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 June 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan are fit for purpose. However, further adjustment should be made to ensure that the statement of action and improvement plan are aligned.

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 (IEB), the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk and the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance in the school, by:
 - ensuring that leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development
 - making use of information from assessments to check regularly on the progress of pupils
 - ensuring that the plans for improvement are more tightly focused on the key issues that need to be addressed
 - developing the role of middle leaders so that they play a key part in the improvement of the school
 - ensuring that governors challenge the leadership of the school from an independent view of the school's performance and are not overly reliant on the headteacher.
- Improve pupils' achievement and behaviour by improving the quality of teaching across the school so that it is at least good by:
 - ensuring that the mathematics curriculum is well planned and taught effectively throughout the school
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils, particularly those that are disadvantaged and the most able, can achieve in lessons
 - ensuring that pupils take greater pride in their work
 - giving pupils better guidance in lessons and in their books as to how they can improve their work.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 January 2016.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work, including three visits jointly observed with the interim headteacher. Shorter visits to breakfast club, assembly and a meeting of the 'Friends of Long Melford Primary School' were also made. The school and local authority plans for improvement were evaluated. In addition, safeguarding documentation, information about pupils' progress, samples of pupils' work, records of the interim executive board (IEB), the school's monitoring of teaching and reports of external support being provided were scrutinised. The inspector met with the interim headteacher, the mathematics and English subject leaders, three members of the IEB, two representatives of the local authority and the Rector. Discussions with staff included a focus on disadvantaged pupils and the effectiveness of professional development. Parents, carers and pupils, including the school council, also discussed the school's progress with the inspector.

Context

Following the June 2015 inspection, the local authority appointed an interim executive board (IEB) to replace the governing body. An interim headteacher experienced in school improvement continues to lead the school. An additional senior leader joined the school in January to provide support one day a week. The recruitment of a substantive headteacher has started. Following a review of leadership roles and responsibilities there are new leaders for mathematics, English and early years/Key Stage 1. The school is preparing to join the St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Multi-Academy Trust on 1 April 2016. Four members of the teaching staff were absent at the time of the monitoring inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Since September, pupils' work indicates that achievement is improving. However, their rates of progress still vary within and between classes. This contributes to achievement in mathematics, reading and writing that, while improved, is still below pupils nationally. Particularly stark is the low proportion of pupils doing better than expected or reaching the higher levels. For example, in class, insufficient challenge for the most-able pupils means that too many repeat work or finish work that is set before deepening their knowledge or refining their skills.

Where pupils are making better progress the quality of teaching and support by teaching assistants combine well. This includes support for pupils with disabilities or special educational needs. Small-group work with an adult has a positive impact on pupils' progress at the school from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 6. However, progress slows when pupils have not been given a sufficiently clear idea

about what is expected of them. Not enough are shown high-quality work to aspire to. This limits their ability to sustain good progress when working unaided. Better work is emerging in English and mathematics, more clearly evident in pupils' separate exercise books introduced since September. In addition, resources such as pupils' 'big red writing books' are helping to focus staff and pupils on reviewing and improving pupils' writing. New curriculum plans and resources in mathematics supported by training for teachers and teaching assistants are having a positive impact on pupils' progress, albeit inconsistent. A whole-school project is planned to ensure that pupils' understanding and enjoyment of mathematics is more widespread. In other subjects, although there are pockets of good work there is little evidence that pupils are building their subject knowledge and skills continuously. This limits the standards pupils are able to attain. Their ability to develop and apply literacy and mathematics in other subjects is underdeveloped.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is inconsistent. However, the impact of training and teachers' response to feedback shows that the proportion of good teaching is increasing. For example, following staff training in guided reading by a local authority adviser, pupils' reading is promoted more regularly and effectively by teachers and teaching assistants. Strengthened by the development of the school library, more frequent monitoring of pupils' reading and support from parents and carers to reinforce pupils' reading at home, girls and boys are developing more confidence and interest in reading. Nevertheless, below-average test results in reading early on, including phonics (letters and the sounds that they make), show the importance of sustaining this work.

The use of assessment information to provide the right level of support for pupils is at an early stage. As a consequence, different lesson activities do not match pupils' needs consistently well. This is a particular concern for pupils ready for a higher level of challenge, including disadvantaged pupils. Work with other schools and the local authority is helping to ensure that assessments provide a more accurate basis for planning and tracking pupils' progress. Lesson observations show that pupils' learning advances quickly when staff use their knowledge of pupils to adapt their teaching. For example, good observation, listening and questioning by the Reception teacher enabled her to extend a child's learning through colour mixing by using a book illustration to discuss the fusion of colours representing the Northern Lights.

Improved planning in English and mathematics, supported by guidance provided by the new leaders of these subjects, is contributing to staff confidence in teaching key skills well. This is evident in the use of 'working walls', which show that pupils learn about concepts such as calculation in mathematics or connectives in English clearly and in an interesting way. The most effective teaching reinforces pupils' understanding through the use of marking and feedback that is constructive but clearly expects more of pupils. In contrast, weaker teaching is reflected in little

guidance for pupils about how to improve their work. Inaccuracies are not always corrected.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's new handwriting policy is contributing to better presentation and pride in work. However, there is still untidy work in some books. Not all pupils practise enough to form letters and numbers clearly and accurately. There is little use of computers to promote high levels of presentation. Although most staff are working hard to present their own writing clearly, some untidy work by pupils mirrors that of the teacher. Nevertheless, well-ordered displays are the norm, including creatively presented displays that promote pupils' curiosity or celebrate their skills. These show that pupils' work is valued. Pupils respect the work of their peers and take interest in the achievements of others. In lessons, when pupils are asked to share their ideas most listen carefully and contribute sensibly. Less productive use of lesson time is often associated with lack of clarity about what is expected and how to use opportunities to work unaided, for example by researching.

Positive relationships between pupils and with staff contribute to pupils feeling safe and supported at school. Girls and boys showed very responsible attitudes throughout the evacuation of the school due to a gas leak during the monitoring inspection. When pupils returned to classes the school council discussed the behaviour of their peers with pride, buoyed by several comments from parents, carers and members of the community who praised them. This unexpected occurrence also demonstrated the care and professionalism of staff, who supervised pupils cohesively and safely. Pupils are positive about the school's improvements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's improvement is underpinned by a clear and accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaker areas of provision. Plans for improvement match the priorities well. Senior and middle leaders regularly evaluate their plans in order to keep improvements on track. The range of evidence used to monitor the school's progress is suitably wide. This includes regular scrutiny of pupils' work, lesson observations, learning walks, discussions with pupils and analysis of progress information. Joint work between school leaders, the interim executive board and the local authority is helping to make sure that monitoring is accurate and actions to improve the school are effective. The local authority statement of action and school plans have proven a sound basis for improvement. However, further alignment is required to ensure that improvements are sustained in order to raise achievement. For example, there is inconsistency between local authority and school targets for pupils. This limits the sharpness of support for pupils falling behind.

The interim executive board that replaced the governing body have addressed concerns that led to the requirement for an external review of governance. For

example, their frequent visits are used effectively to find out first-hand how staff and pupils are responding to new initiatives. This information contributes to more effective performance management of staff, including the headteacher, and more judicious use of resources. For example, professional development for the new English and mathematics leaders is having a demonstrable impact on leading and inspiring other staff and the pupils. Staff are using their engagement with other schools to raise expectations. Greater efficiency in the management of the school's finances is helping to maximise the resources available. However, additional funding designed to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is still not used effectively. School leaders have commissioned a second external review of pupil premium in order to make more rapid improvements.

Parents and carers are regularly informed about the school's progress through newsletters and increased opportunities to meet with staff, for example through a parents' forum. The interim executive board provide opportunities at various times of the day in order to give all parents and carers an opportunity to participate. However, there is not enough systematic evaluation of parents' and carers' views to measure improvement. Although most parents and carers expressed much more positive views than at the time of the last inspection, some uncertainty still exists. However, the involvement of parents and carers in new initiatives designed to capitalise on pupils' learning at home, for example through reading, show increasing support. A loyal and determined core of parents and carers through their voluntary work contribute very positively to the school's capacity to improve.

External support

The school benefits from a range of support provided by the local authority; for example professional development for teachers and subject leaders, guidance in personnel and finance matters, and leadership support through regular meetings with the interim headteacher and executive board. Work to ensure that the curriculum is compliant and assessments are accurate is helping to establish a stronger basis for improvement. Particularly effective are strategies such as those used to improve pupils' reading. These involve a mixture of externally provided training and internal ideas, followed by focused analysis of the impact. Although staff are sharing their work within school to address inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment, not all contribute to external networks capable of informing and enriching this work.

Increased links with the diocese show how the school plans to build on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural strengths of the school identified at the last inspection.