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Mrs Nichola Perry
Executive Headteacher
St Christopher's CEVCP School
Bellflower Crescent
Red Lodge
Bury St Edmunds
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IP28 8XQ

Dear Mrs Perry

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Christopher's CEVCP School

Following my visit to your school on 6–7 October 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk County Council and the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that the overall quality is at least good by ensuring that:
 - work is set at the right level of difficulty for all pupils, including the most able
 - teachers check carefully on pupils' learning and move them on quickly if they understand, or give extra support if it is needed
 - feedback helps pupils to understand how they can improve
 - teaching interests pupils so that they work hard, stay on task and do not disrupt their own learning or that of others.

- Raise pupils' attainment and improve their progress so that standards are at least in line with national averages by the end of Key Stage 2 by ensuring that:
 - assessments made by all teachers of pupils' work are accurate
 - all staff have the knowledge necessary to teach writing and mathematics effectively
 - teachers have high expectations regarding the quality of presentation and the standards pupils can reach in writing
 - girls are challenged to make good progress in mathematics
 - the impact of the extra support given to pupils who have special educational needs, and to those eligible for the pupil premium, is measured carefully, and that changes are made quickly when necessary.

- Urgently improve leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - safeguarding procedures are tightly adhered to and all necessary risk assessments are in place
 - senior leaders concentrate on improving teaching, learning and achievement
 - systems are in place to plan and check on the school's work so that the most urgent priorities are identified and tackled quickly, and staff and governors know how and when progress will be monitored
 - all leaders use information about pupils' progress to monitor the quality of teaching and provide teachers with additional support where necessary so that they improve
 - pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe by understanding the different types of bullying, knowing what to do if it occurs
 - the newly structured governing body are quickly trained so that they can check the school's work more effectively and hold leaders to account for the rapid improvements required.

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 third monitoring inspection on 6–7 October 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of staff, groups of pupils, parents, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Following long-term absence, the substantive headteacher has now left the school. In June 2015 the governing body appointed an executive headteacher to provide strategic leadership for the school. The substantive deputy headteacher has remained in the role of acting headteacher, taking responsibility for the day-to-day management and organisation of the school. At the time of the last monitoring inspection, four classes were being taught by long-term supply teachers. This situation has been resolved and the school is now fully staffed.

The school expected to become an academy, sponsored by the National Education Trust, on 1 September 2015. However, this did not happen and the school's conversion to becoming an academy has been delayed. A new sponsor has been identified and plans for the school to become a sponsored academy are progressing.

The chair and vice-chair have both resigned from the governing body. A new chair and vice-chair have been elected and took up their posts at the beginning of the month. Two other governors have also left and there are currently a number of vacancies on the governing body.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional information shows that pupils' attainment in 2015 was well below the (2014) national average at the end of Key Stage 2. At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment was below average in reading and writing and broadly in line with the national average in mathematics. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the proportion reaching the expected level in the phonics screening check in Year 1, was also below the (2014) national average. In early years and Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in 2015 was lower than in 2014.

Although this assessment information shows that outcomes for pupils continue to give cause for concern, the underlying story is more heartening. Previously, assessment had been found to be inaccurate and unreliable. The school has worked hard to improve this and assessment procedures are now more rigorous. While it is disappointing that results fell in early years and Key Stage 1, it is encouraging that the school now has an accurate baseline to work from.

Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 2 means that the school is unlikely to meet the 2015 floor standards when they are published. Floor standards are the minimum expectation, set by the government, for pupils' progress and attainment. However, results in the 2015 national tests were the best the school has ever achieved with greater proportions reaching the expected level in English and mathematics than ever before. The proportion who achieved the higher levels also rose this year, particularly in reading and mathematics.

The work seen in pupils' exercise books shows signs of improvement. The school has made pupils' presentation of their work a high priority and it is clear that expectations have been raised. Many more pupils now show pride in their work and more books are neatly presented. However, inconsistency remains and the school's leaders know that there is more to be done. Pupils have too few opportunities to write freely or at length and this limits their progress.

Throughout the school, although less so in upper Key Stage 2, pupils' books contain a large number of worksheets and cloze passages. These restrict the opportunities that pupils have to write freely and limits their progress as a result.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The difficulties the school had in recruiting teachers made the initial pace of improvement slow. A continual flow of supply teachers working in the school made the task of introducing and embedding expectations and approaches much more difficult. Leaders worked hard to ensure that the school was fully staffed for the beginning of the academic year. As a result, it is already clear that staff have formed a cohesive group and an increased sense of purpose is tangible.

Assessment procedures are being strengthened. The school's leaders focused on ensuring the accuracy of assessment carried out in the summer term in order to establish a baseline to move forward from. The next set of assessments are due to be carried out just before the October half-term holiday and will provide the first opportunity for the school to produce accurate information on the progress pupils are making. Leaders have now purchased a commercial assessment system in order to ensure that their approach matches that of neighbouring schools and to enable them to track progress accurately and thoroughly.

There have been improvements in teachers' use of day-to-day assessment and this is beginning to have an impact on the progress pupils make. Throughout the school teachers identify 'steps to success' in each lesson which are used to help pupils focus their learning. This is becoming well established and pupils routinely stick their 'steps to success' into their exercise books at the beginning of each lesson. However, in some classes the system has become over-complicated and the impact on pupils' learning is lessened. For example, in one lesson the teacher had listed almost a dozen steps to be achieved; rather than focus pupils' learning on specific skills or knowledge, the 'steps to success ladder' became a meaningless tick sheet rather than a useful prompt for learning.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is improving but is still inconsistent across the school. Teachers throughout the school continue to mark work regularly and conscientiously. However, some marking provides much more useful feedback to pupils than others. In the best examples, teachers' marking provides pupils with clear feedback on what to do next in order to improve their work because teachers choose the most appropriate areas for pupils to focus on.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to behave well most of the time. The low-level disruption that was prevalent during the second monitoring visit remains but has been reduced. Teachers' expectations of what is and is not acceptable behaviour have been raised and this is filtering through to pupils. However, there is still inconsistency across the school with much better behaviour and pupils much more focused on their learning in some classes than others.

Pupils expressed mixed opinions about bullying to the inspector; some pupils feel that there is hardly any bullying, others say that there is 'quite a bit'. However, what is clear is that pupils still do not have a good enough understanding of what bullying is, what it is not and what they should do if they are subject to it or witness it. Some pupils think that it is their job to deal with bullying and others think that they should 'just ignore it'. One pupil had taken the teaching of the parable of Jesus turning the other cheek, told during collective worship, to mean that pupils should do the same thing if they are bullied. The school is aware of the shortcomings in pupils' understanding and plans are in place to begin to address these during the upcoming anti-bullying week in November.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management are now much more effective. The executive headteacher is steering the school convincingly and staff have confidence in her ability to lead them in the right direction. A complete and up-to-date action plan is now in place. The executive headteacher is aware that this now needs to be developed further to enable governors to monitor the school's progress more efficiently and to plan how the school will improve sufficiently to no longer require special measures by the time of its next inspection.

However, longer-term leadership remains a concern. The executive headteacher's appointment is temporary and the governors have decided against recruiting a substantive headteacher until the issue of academisation is resolved. The governing body and the local authority are aware that establishing a long-term leadership solution must be a key priority for the school.

There have been a number of changes to the governing body in recent months and four governors have resigned, for a variety of reasons. A new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have very recently been elected. Although they are both

experienced governors, neither has led a governing body before. Governors are fully aware that they must seek training and guidance as quickly as possible in order to fulfil their roles effectively; the chair has already established links with the experienced chair of another governing body. There is evidence that some of the improvements noted at the last monitoring visit have continued. The governor linked to inclusion, for example, has attended training and now meets with the inclusion coordinator regularly, giving him a far better understanding of the issues.

The effectiveness of middle leaders – that is, leaders below the executive headteacher and acting headteacher – is developing very well. Leaders are far more confident and competent in their roles than they were at the time of the last monitoring inspection and they have a far better understanding of the issues that need to be addressed. The inclusion coordinator established herself quickly in her role and had recently taken responsibility for the pupil premium grant at the point of the last monitoring inspection. She is highly effective in this role. The school now has a very clear understanding of the difference in outcomes for pupils eligible for the premium because they are disadvantaged and those who are eligible because they are from service families. The inclusion coordinator has mapped provision so that she knows exactly how the grant is being spent and what the effectiveness of this is. She is aware that the grant is not always spent as effectively as possible, and that disadvantaged pupils continue to underachieve, but now has systems in place to begin to address this.

External support

The local authority continues to support the school well and monitor its progress closely. The executive headteacher was appointed by the governing body at the local authority's suggestion; this appointment has been instrumental in helping the school to move in the right direction.