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

Dear Mrs Perry

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Christopher's CEVCP School

Following my visit with Elizabeth Hackett, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 4–5 May 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 that 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 that took place in October 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, the regional schools commissioner 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 that 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 4–5 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with school leaders, other staff, governors, pupils, parents and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors checked the school's single central record and other documents related to safeguarding.

Context

The deputy headteacher, latterly the acting headteacher, left the school in November 2015. The assistant headteacher left the school at the end of the autumn term. The interim executive headteacher has worked full time since the departure of the deputy headteacher. An acting assistant headteacher has been appointed from within the existing teaching staff. A new deputy headteacher has been recruited externally and will take up her post in September 2016. Two new governors have joined the governing body since the last monitoring inspection.

Plans for the school to become an academy, sponsored by the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT), are well advanced. Both the school and the sponsor had expected the conversion to have happened by now. Two proposed dates for conversion have passed and it is now planned for the school to become a sponsored academy on 1 September 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Despite a number of changes to the senior leadership of the school, the overall effectiveness of leadership and management has improved since the last monitoring inspection. The interim executive headteacher provides strong and decisive leadership. She has a very clear vision for the school and has created a shared sense of purpose among the staff.

The school now knows itself better than it has in the past. Self-evaluation is ongoing and is mostly accurate. The school's self-evaluation summary is suitably analytical and includes an appropriate level of detail. It is written in language that is accessible and easily understood by governors who are not professionally engaged in education.

The school has developed an approach to improvement planning that it finds works well. The school's leaders have found that their termly 'rapid action plan' (RAP) is effective in ensuring that school improvement remains on track and momentum is maintained. Each RAP is shared with staff and governors and the school finds that the week-by-week layout of the plan ensures that actions are not missed. However, although the RAP works well for this school operationally, it does not provide a

strategy for the longer term. As was the case at the last monitoring visit, the school has not planned for the longer term and does not have a clear enough strategic view of where it intends to be in, for example, a year's time and what the steps are to get there. To use an analogy, each termly RAP gives the school a piece of the puzzle but the absence of a strategic overview means that it does not have a picture to refer to, to check that it is fitting the pieces together correctly. The formulation of a strategic plan, however skeletal, would enable governors to ensure that suitably aspirational targets are set for the longer term and that milestones are placed at suitable intervals to ensure that they are achieved.

The quality of teaching is now being monitored much more closely and effective action is being taken, where necessary, to improve it. Appropriate support plans have been put in place to provide teachers with the help they need to improve their practice. The executive headteacher is not afraid to take decisive action to tackle weaknesses when the need arises.

Parents are far more engaged with the school than they were at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Approximately 30 parents attended a meeting with the lead inspector, a tenfold increase on the previous meeting. Most parents say that they are happy with the school and it is clear that levels of satisfaction are improving. Parents told the lead inspector that behaviour has improved, there is better provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and their children are happy, safe and enjoy school.

Some parents told the lead inspector that the school does not provide enough information on the curriculum and that they do not know what their children are learning at school. Inspection evidence does not support this. The school's website contains a wealth of information about the curriculum covering all subjects and all year groups. Some parents were concerned that some classes have a regular spelling test and other classes do not. The executive headteacher is aware of this inconsistency. However, she has rightly prioritised other areas that require more urgent attention at this stage in the school's development. Similarly, some parents feel that they do not see the executive headteacher frequently enough at the beginning and end of the school day. Again, the executive headteacher is aware of this but has not yet had time to address it. She does, however, have a very high profile throughout the day while the school is in operation.

The governing body is now more settled and is becoming increasingly effective. Governors have a much better understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses than previously. A number of governors have been recruited for their individual skills and expertise and, as a result, there is now a much better range of experience and knowledge among the governing body. Governors now hold the school's leaders to account more robustly and ask the challenging questions that are necessary to carry out their role effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The positive feeling that was starting to emerge at the time of the last monitoring inspection has continued and has grown. The school now has a palpable 'buzz' and is clearly a place that people want to be part of. It is very clear that all staff are deeply committed to ensuring that the school will no longer require special measures in the shortest possible time.

When the last monitoring inspection took place in October 2015, a new system had very recently been introduced to track and monitor pupils' outcomes. The school was confident that it had assessed pupils' attainment accurately and that it would soon be possible to measure the progress pupils make. Leaders have developed assessment arrangements well since this time and the progress pupils make is now monitored thoroughly. This is a huge improvement. The school's leaders now know precisely which pupils are making expected or better progress and which pupils need further help or support to help them to do so.

The early years provision, including the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) is greatly improved. The indoor environment is now of a much better quality and the outdoor area is unrecognisable. The enclosed courtyard was previously neglected and unused. It is now a highly suitable outdoor classroom providing a wealth of attractive and well-planned activities. As a result, children are now much more interested in the tasks provided for them and persevere for longer in order to achieve a result. For example, one group of children spent an extended period of time working together to fill buckets with water using a piece of guttering. The teacher intervened skilfully and his good use of questioning encouraged the children to work out how they could make the water travel faster and what would happen if they increased the angle of the gutter's slope.

It is very clear that the continued focus on improving the quality of teaching is working. Pupils are now showing better attitudes to learning because teachers' expectations of them are much higher. Where teaching is strong, teachers use resources well to enhance pupils' learning: they stop and check that pupils have understood what they have been taught during lessons; they ensure that pupils apply their phonics knowledge in their reading and writing; and they insist that pupils take care and show pride in their work.

The quality of teaching needs further development because, although there are now examples of good practice throughout the school, there are still pockets where teaching is weaker. Pupils do not make as much progress as they should in writing because they have too few opportunities to write freely and at length.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Low-level disruptive behaviour was an area of concern during earlier monitoring visits to the school. Improvements were evident at the last monitoring inspection and behaviour is now vastly improved. The school has taken very effective action to tackle poor behaviour and to reward good behaviour. Clear systems have been introduced and these are being followed consistently throughout the school. Expectations of how pupils should behave are now notably higher both in classrooms and around the school.

Pupils are also now showing much better attitudes to learning and are much keener to do well. For example, in a Year 5/6 literacy lesson, pupils worked in absolute silence while they completed a task. When questioned by the lead inspector, pupils said that they always work silently while they are writing. The inspector asked what they thought about this and pupils enthusiastically said that they like it because it helps them to concentrate. This attitude is increasingly the case throughout the school and St Christopher's is a much calmer place as a result.

Pupils say that they are much happier at school now. They say that their work is more challenging and they appreciate having the opportunity to choose the 'tricky, trickier or trickiest' work in their literacy and numeracy lessons.

At the last monitoring inspection, some pupils expressed concerns about bullying and some pupils were unclear both about what constitutes bullying and what to do if it should happen to them. Pupils now show a much better understanding of what bullying is and is not. No pupils said that they were concerned about bullying when asked by inspectors. Pupils said that staff 'are really strict about it now' and expressed total confidence that any member of staff would deal properly with any issues that should arise.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are improving but remain inadequate. Pupils' attainment remains below the national average and, in some cases, well below it. For example, in Year 6, the school's assessment information shows that no pupils are currently working at or above age-related expectations in writing and mathematics.

The progress that pupils are making is much more encouraging. Pupils in some year groups are making expected progress and pupils in other year groups are making good progress. This is a considerably better picture than previously. However, some pupils are still making slow progress and this must be addressed. It is vital that all groups of pupils in all year groups make at least expected progress, with many making rapid progress, in order to start to close the gaps in pupils' attainment caused by historic underachievement.

The work in pupils' exercise books also shows that most pupils are now making at least expected progress and some are making more rapid progress. Pupils are now taking greater pride in their work and their better attitudes to learning are evident in the work they produce. In some cases, the 'steps to success' that are stuck into pupils' books at the start of every lesson continue to be overly long and complicated. Where this is the case, pupils make slower progress because teachers ask them to do too many things at once rather than focusing more precisely on what is the key learning point for that lesson.

External support

A new standards and excellence adviser was assigned by the local authority and started working with the school in November 2015. She has quickly formed very strong and productive working relationships with staff and the impact of her work in improving the quality of leadership and management in the school is clear.