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Mrs J Tringham  
Interim Headteacher  
Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School  
Tollesbury Road  
Tolleshunt D'Arcy  
Maldon  
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Dear Mrs Tringham

### **Requires improvement: monitoring visit to Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, the previous executive headteacher, your deputy headteacher, pupils, and six members of the governing body including the chair. I also held discussions with representatives from the local authority and diocese to discuss the actions being taken to improve the school. I scrutinised a range of key documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection. We visited several classrooms together and I listened to five pupils read.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been many changes in both leadership and staffing. The substantive headteacher left the school in May 2016. An executive headteacher was appointed for the summer term for two days per week to work alongside the deputy headteacher. He took up his position in January 2016 and has worked with all of the leaders since the previous inspection. Leadership was then handed over at the end of the summer term to another executive headteacher in readiness for the autumn term. You have subsequently taken up post following the departure of the interim headteacher on Friday 9 September. It is appreciated, therefore, that my visit coincided with this being your first day as interim headteacher at the school. Since May 2016, responsibility for the leadership of English and mathematics has been that of the deputy headteacher. Due to the drop in the number of pupils on roll and its knock-on effect on finances, the school has had to reduce the number of classes from four to three. All classes are now taught in mixed age groups. Several teachers have changed since January 2016. At the start of this academic year, four new staff joined the school. The special educational needs coordinator now has class responsibility and shares this with her substantive role. This will be supplemented by support from a local school to ensure that any negative impact on pupils' learning is minimised. Also, several new governors have been appointed since the previous inspection. The governing body is being supported by a national leader of governance.

## **Main findings**

Despite all of the challenges, staff morale is good. Staff have worked hard to improve teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. Ensuring good teaching that is consistent across the school has been a challenge, but it is one that leaders have embraced wholeheartedly. Much has been put in place to develop teachers' skills, but changes in staffing have limited the impact that this has had on pupils' outcomes. Leaders will not accept anything less than good teaching. However, this has meant that some classes have experienced several changes in teacher since the last inspection. This, in turn, has meant that pupils' progress has not been as good as it should be. The deputy headteacher knows individual pupils well and has a good understanding of the school's assessment information. He therefore knows the school's current priorities. The interim headteacher has introduced half-termly tracking of pupils to ensure that no pupil falls behind the expectations that the school has set. I am confident from the evidence seen during my visit that this will be rigorously monitored and that any additional support will be swiftly put in place.

Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not doing as well as they should be. This has been hampered by changes in teachers and leadership. The achievement of these groups, and indeed the most able pupils in the school, must be seen as a priority. Governors will need to ensure that better use is made of the additional funding that the school receives for

some groups. Leaders must make sure that all adults are aware of the part they play in ensuring that all pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

The school's safeguarding procedures remain effective. Pupils I met with today say they feel safe in school and know who to go to if they have a concern. They behave well in class and any poor behaviour is tackled swiftly and effectively. Attendance is below the national average. Leaders are working with families to ensure that this improves through regular celebration of individual class attendance. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is not good enough, and these are the most vulnerable pupils. Governors are aware of the important part they play in ensuring that pupils are safe and secure in school and take their responsibilities seriously. They have recently audited child protection arrangements within the school to ensure that these are robust. Although aspects of the school's website are out of date, governors have this in hand. They are systematically working through what needs to be done to ensure that information is accurate and complies with statutory requirements.

The school has made good links with other outstanding schools to ensure that all staff know what a good learning environment looks like. As a result of this very proactive approach, the school has been transformed over the last term. It is now tidy, bright and a welcoming place for pupils to learn. Parents' support in ensuring that pupils came back in the autumn term to a school of which they should be proud is to be applauded. This demonstrates the development of even better relationships with the school community and, in particular, parents.

I spoke with many parents at the end of the school day during my visit. Although some parents have found recent staffing changes challenging, they unanimously agree that these changes are for the best. They recognise that some aspects are outside of the school's control but are pleased that there is now some stability and security of leadership. This, they say, is very positive and they are confident that the school will continue rapidly on its journey to being a good school. Some parents who expressed that they had had cause to come into school to discuss a concern said that they were listened to and, largely, actions were put in place.

There are still some areas about which you know rapid progress must take place. Outcomes for pupils at key stages 1 and 2 were below those expected nationally. Although progress at both key stages was better than attainment, leaders are aware that they need to speed up pupils' progress to ensure that they catch up with their peers nationally. Having looked at a variety of books from the last academic year, it is clear that pupils' work matched their needs in early years and key stage 1. Pupils' books show good progress since January 2016 in English, mathematics, science and other subjects, like religious education, history and geography. Progress in lower key stage 2 was less evident and work was not well matched to pupils' needs or abilities. This will remain a priority for the school, especially as the reorganisation of teaching has meant that there are now mixed age classes throughout the school.

Nevertheless, in 2016 Year 2 pupils made good progress, according to their books, and therefore have the capacity to continue to do so in their current year group. The challenge will be ensuring that Year 4 pupils do the same this year. This also applies to pupils who are now in Years 5 and 6.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes have improved since the previous inspection. Much has been done to ensure that pupils understand the expectations of their behaviour in class and what it is they need to do during lessons. However, there is still little clarity among pupils about what they need to do to improve their work. As a consequence, pupils I spoke to during my visit were able to say what they felt they were good at, but unable to identify any areas for improvement. I know from our conversations during my visit that this is something you and the deputy headteacher are acutely aware of. You recognise that pupils are mostly articulate, capable and have the capacity, as seen in books, to do much better than they are currently. But they can only do so if teachers and adults support them in the identification of what they need to do and how they can get there. Interestingly, pupils told me they want to be pilots, teachers, electricians, zoo keepers, policemen and office workers when they leave school. They clearly, therefore, know that they can achieve and have high aspirations, upon which the school can build.

The governing body has actively sought support and welcomed it with open arms. With the aid of the local authority improvement board and diocese support, governors have tackled previously weaker teaching and also assured secure leadership for the next year. The chair and vice-chair of governors have worked relentlessly to ensure that the governing body is at its full capacity. They are now concentrating on the school's key strategic priorities. In so doing, they have explored becoming part of a multi-academy trust and different structures of leadership given the school's size. This proactive approach gives a strong indication of all new and more experienced governors' commitment and dedication to, and investment in, the pupils of Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas. They told me clearly what still needs to be done in order for their strategic responsibilities to be fully met, and, in particular for pupils' outcomes to be as good as they can be. However, they are very positive about the next year, confident that the school will be at least a good school within the given timescale. I will ensure that I inform you and the chair of governors about the date for Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminar for leaders and governors.

Ofsted will continue monitoring of the school until its next section 5 inspection, and I will return to the school in the spring term 2017.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the diocese and the director of children's services for Essex.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Brock  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**