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Mr Charles Morris
Interim Headteacher
The Coombes Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Morris

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Coombes Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 May 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2016.

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 both fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Oxford, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Wokingham. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2016

- Improve the leadership, management and governance of the school by ensuring that:
 - all governors and leaders have a secure understanding of pupils' progress information
 - leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness
 - governors take an active role in the strategic development of the school
 - governors effectively hold senior leaders to account
 - pupils across the school receive a suitably challenging curriculum that is broad and balanced
 - pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and British values are effectively promoted
 - equality of opportunity enables all pupils to have an equal chance of success
 - effective provision is in place to ensure that all groups, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability, make good progress
 - the new systems for tracking pupils' progress in all subjects, performance management, behaviour management and raising standards in teaching and learning are embedded.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to secure good progress for all pupils across the range of subjects, including in the early years, by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils can do and the progress that they can make
 - making sure that regular and accurate checks are made on pupils' learning
 - ensuring teaching actively promotes learning
 - using assessment information to provide suitably challenging lessons that match all pupils' learning needs
 - increasing teachers' understanding of the progression of knowledge and key skills in all subjects.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years by making sure that children have access to activities to support their development across the areas of learning both inside and outside.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in

order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 May 2017

Evidence

I observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents relating to pupils' progress, pupils' safety, and the school's own monitoring and evaluation of its improvement. I met with the interim headteacher and deputy headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, staff, the chair of the interim executive board, a representative from the local authority and the consultant headteacher. I also spoke on the telephone with a representative from the diocese.

I visited classrooms, often jointly with the interim headteacher or deputy headteacher, to observe learning. I also scrutinised pupils' books and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. I took account of the school's own information about pupils' progress and evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school improvement plan.

Context

Following the inspection, the local authority appointed an interim headteacher and convened an interim executive board (IEB) to replace the local governing body. This body has worked with the local authority, the diocese and the regional schools commissioner to secure a sponsor academy for the school. This was initially proposed to be by the end of the first term following the inspection. This has taken longer than anticipated and conversion to academy status had not been completed by May 2017. However, a sponsor has now been agreed and the process toward conversion to academy status has commenced. The IEB has appointed a substantive headteacher to start in September 2017.

There have been many staffing changes since the previous inspection, and the interim headteacher has restructured the school's middle leadership in order to focus its work more closely on learning and the achievement of groups throughout the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has successfully moved the school forward on its journey of improvement. His clear vision provides much-needed direction and determined, strong leadership. He established safeguarding, teaching and learning as the key priorities for the school. He has successfully changed the understanding of staff and parents of what the school needs to achieve for the pupils in its care. Staff trust his leadership and many can see what has been achieved since the previous inspection. Many parents are positive about the changes, with one saying the school is, 'more professional now', and another commenting that, 'We've gained more than we've lost with the culture change.'

In the months following the inspection, the IEB spent a considerable amount of time exploring options for conversion to academy status. This distracted it from the key priority of school improvement and left the interim headteacher without the capacity to make the required changes in the first few months. Since January 2017, the pace of change and improvement has been rapid because the IEB appointed an interim deputy headteacher and a consultant headteacher to support the interim headteacher. These key members of staff have provided much-needed staff training and coaching. Evidence gathered on inspection shows the recent increase to the pace of progress. This is especially the case for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which are now effective. The IEB has an accurate view of what it needs to do to help the school to improve.

The external review of the pupil premium was completed in September 2016. Many of its recommendations are in place and are starting to make a difference for disadvantaged pupils. The close focus on vulnerable groups of pupils has increased the understanding of staff of pupils' specific barriers to learning. School information and the scrutiny of pupils' books indicate that the work to support these pupils is effective.

The review of governance recommended at the previous inspection is not now appropriate as the local authority removed the local governing body, replacing it with the IEB.

The interim headteacher's plans for school improvement are thorough and detailed. They show his clear understanding of the changes that need to be achieved. The plans are used as a working document by all members of the leadership team and IEB. This ensures that all leaders and those with responsibility for governance have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness.

Leaders have improved teaching and learning in the school through extensive training and support for teachers. This is based on leaders' accurate understanding of teaching across the school. Leaders verify information about the progress that pupils make by comparison with standardised assessments, the work in pupils' books and observations of teaching. There are pockets of strong practice but leaders understand that there is still much to do.

Leaders have ensured that pupils are now provided with a broad and balanced curriculum. However, for Year 6 the time spent on catching up with their learning in reading, writing and mathematics has limited their breadth of learning.

Safeguarding has been at the forefront of many of the changes implemented during this time. Safeguarding is effective, and systems to safeguard pupils have been strengthened. Leaders have, rightly, drawn attention to the imminent need for extensive work to improve the safety of parts of the school grounds, including the many wooden structures that form part of the school's history.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The impact of the interim leadership and the consultant headteacher is clearly evident. Leaders have raised expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. This has helped to raise standards of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Leaders have established non-negotiable standards for learning. They have provided extensive training and support for teachers to plan lessons that meet national curriculum expectations and the needs of the pupils in their class. Leaders have restructured timetables to enable teachers to plan together. These measures have helped to raise standards and provide greater consistency to pupils about what they are taught. However, while the quality of teaching is improving overall, too many lessons are based on the assumption that all pupils need the same tasks and learning.

Leaders use standardised tests to gather accurate information about pupils' attainment and their learning needs. Leaders are now training teachers to develop a secure understanding of the national curriculum and age-related expectations for learning. Work with external partners has been effective in raising teachers' expectations and their understanding of 'what good looks like' regarding pupils' work. Although standards are rising, the inspection evidence matches leaders' evaluation that progress is inconsistent across the school.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved. Leaders have changed teachers' and teaching assistants' notions of inclusion. Class teachers are taking more direct responsibility for pupils requiring extra help, ensuring that these pupils are supported as much as possible through quality teaching in the class. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that these pupils' very tight, achievable targets are tested and reviewed frequently. Her effective communication with parents helps them to support their children. Similarly, the provision for vulnerable pupils is of increasingly high quality, and this group of pupils are kept at a high profile among staff by the coordinator. Training for staff to support these pupils has been effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They told me that they liked the new system of lining up before school because it means that everyone is calm and focused. I observed pupils lining up sensibly before school with a quiet buzz of anticipation about the day ahead. Pupils also highlighted the time-out room as a successful new feature. They told me that it has stopped individuals behaving poorly at lunch and playtimes. Pupils also said that they like their new school uniform and that they feel safe at school.

Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain through a focus on equality and fundamental British values. The introduction of the democratic prefect system has been successful and it helped pupils to explain to me why democracy is important.

Pupils demonstrate a perceptive and sensitive understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of life, for example through the 'reflection book' in which they take it in turns to 'wonder about the world'. These thoughts are then considered in shared worship. Pupils' reflections cover varied topics such as the referendum about membership of the European Union, refugees and dealing with bereavement.

The 'Dandelion Club' has been particularly successful in supporting families of members of the armed forces. Pupils were keen to tell me of the difference it has made, to them and their families, both in and out of school.

Leaders work effectively with the parents of the pupils whose attendance is not yet good enough. Leaders' actions are starting to show an improvement with these pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress that pupils make is an improving picture, but many pupils are still working below expected levels.

School information and scrutiny of pupils' books indicate that pupils in Years 3, 5 and 6 are making good progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making more secure progress across the school than previously. However, staff are not yet well placed to provide sufficient challenge for the most able.

Writing remains a whole-school priority, and I saw varied progress with this aspect of learning across the school. Where learning is more effective, pupils are reminded to use basics such as capital letters and full stops. However, in some lessons and books, pupils continue to make basic errors in their writing while focusing on the need for adjectives and fronted adverbials.

Attainment and progress in mathematics and reading are improving in most year groups. However, leaders are aware that there is still a way to go. They need to ensure that pupils catch up from previous underachievement. For example, some pupils in Year 3 were not able to work at the expected standard because they did not know their times-tables from Year 2.

Outcomes for children in the early years are below expectations. The work to improve the learning space has enabled greater consistency of provision. The development of the outdoor space is unfinished but plans are in place to improve this.

External support

Initially, external support from the local authority provided useful monitoring, but the interim headteacher needed greater support to develop leadership capacity in the school. Once this support was provided, the school's progress accelerated.

The work of the consultant headteacher has been highly effective, especially for the early years provision. For example, the much-needed improvements to the early years environment were too slow until the consultant headteacher made frequent visits and spearheaded this change. This is still a work in progress, but steps are now being taken in the right direction.

Coaching, shared planning and moderation of pupils' work with other providers has also improved teachers' skills and the overall provision for pupils.