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Mrs Pauline Ward
Executive Headteacher
Southminster Church of England (Controlled) Primary School
Burnham Road
Southminster
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Dear Mrs Ward

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Southminster Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 July 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the head of school, the chair of the executive board, a group of teachers and a group of pupils. I held a telephone conversation with the chief executive of the multi-academy trust (MAT). Together we visited each class to see pupils' learning and to look at their work. The MAT's statement of action and the school's improvement action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new executive board has replaced the governing body. There have been new appointments to the teaching staff.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

At the time of the section 5 inspection, the current leadership was new, but some improvement was already apparent. Following staff changes since January, the pace of improvement has accelerated. The new executive board brings strong experience of governance and has increased the level of monitoring and support. You, as the executive headteacher, bring experience of improving a local school. Together with the head of school, you make an effective and formidable team. You recognise the need to strengthen leadership further and so have appointed an assistant headteacher to be shared between your two schools from September 2017.

The most striking improvement is in behaviour. In contrast to what is described in the inspection report, the school is now a calm and orderly community. Year 6 pupils gave me an account of their classroom in the autumn term which they described as 'chaotic'. They were effusive about the improvements that have taken place. As I toured the school with you I found happy children who were engaged well in their work. Teachers agree that behaviour has improved markedly due to consistent approaches and appropriate expectations by adults.

At the previous inspection, leaders were given actions to take to make safeguarding fully effective. These actions revolved around more rigorous recruitment practices. I checked the single central record and examples of staff files. The processes are now thorough and appropriate. In this important development you have been assisted by the member of the executive board with safeguarding responsibility who has experience and expertise in this area. All staff have completed safeguarding training. Year 6 pupils told me that a year ago they did not feel safe at school. Now they do because of better control of access to the site, much better behaviour, and teaching about online safety.

At the time of the previous inspection, teachers did not assess pupils' progress accurately. As a result of more precise assessment, you now have a much better understanding of pupils' progress and how far behind expectations pupils are. Building on this, you have put in place interventions to address pupils' needs.

Last autumn, phonics was not taught well. As a result, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check in 2016 was low. As a result of training for all staff and effective work in this area, most pupils reached the expected standard in Year 1, with the result that the proportion doing so was equal to the national average for 2016.

There has been a very dramatic improvement in the early years, with a new teacher since January and a new curriculum. Pupils are proud of their work and their progress in writing is strong. The proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development this year is well above the national average for recent years.

In key stage 2, pupils are making much better progress than they were at the time of the previous inspection. Year 6 pupils are hugely appreciative of the support they received from their new class teacher in preparing them for their national tests. One said, 'What he has done for us in a term and a half is amazing.' Despite this, the long legacy of previously poor provision meant that national test results this summer were still very low.

Other criticisms in the previous inspection report have been addressed. The school website has been redesigned and now meets requirements for the inclusion of all required information. Physical education and sport premium funding is better accounted for, as is the use and impact of pupil premium funding. The development of pupils' cultural awareness is improving with some exciting trips, such as to the Royal Opera House.

Your improvement plan for the school is appropriately aligned to the priorities in the inspection report. It has clear targets and success measures. The MAT has improved its action plan and it is now acceptable. It would be helpful to align the two plans and share their use with staff. Teachers claim to be unaware of the improvement plan. Representatives of the MAT continue to visit, providing training and support. Teachers recognise the need to broaden their experience by seeing different practice. They are not always clear about why they are doing things, or what the MAT visitors have found. You recognise that there is a communication gap between leaders and classroom teachers and will work to address this to hasten improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The MAT's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector