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Mrs Mary Foreman
Interim headteacher
Middleton Church of England Primary Academy
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Dear Mrs Foreman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Middleton Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 July 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 October 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Swiftly improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:
 - ensuring that all agreed new processes are implemented consistently by all staff
 - checking frequently that teaching is consistently effective in meeting pupils' needs
 - evaluating rigorously the difference that leaders' actions make to pupils' learning
 - making sure that improvement plans have robust measurements for judging the success of the actions taken
 - reporting and reviewing the success of improvement plans frequently
 - making sure that the use of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils is effective in narrowing the gap in achievement between them and other pupils nationally
 - governors being steadfast and robust in holding leaders to account for pupils' outcomes in all subjects
 - developing positive relationships with parents and increasing their confidence in the school to support children's education.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' achievement across the school so that:
 - teachers have the necessary skills to assess pupils' outcomes accurately
 - all adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - work matches the needs and abilities of the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - pupils understand precisely what is expected of them, and what they need to do to be successful learners
 - learning support assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning.

- Implementing a high quality curriculum so that pupils are prepared well for the next stages in their education by:
 - making sure that all pupils have equality of provision
 - making sure that there is sufficient time to teach all subjects of the curriculum.

- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - establishing a strong culture of safeguarding pupils
 - eradicating disruptive behaviour within the classroom and around the school

- ensuring that all staff use the school's agreed behaviour management strategies
- ensuring that assessment of pupils' personal development is thorough
- securing appropriate intervention and the help of external agencies
- nurturing positive, aspirational behaviours for learning so that pupils want to do their best and, consequently, achieve well.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 13 to 14 July 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, observed teaching in all classes, scrutinised pupils' work and school documents and met with the interim headteacher, the head of school, the English subject leader and the leader for special educational needs. The inspector spoke with some parents and met with a group of pupils, with the chair of the executive board and with the chair and other members of the academy trust.

Context

Since the previous inspection, an interim headteacher has been appointed. A substantive executive headteacher has been appointed for September 2017 who will lead the school in partnership with her current school, working towards federating the schools. The interim headteacher is remaining in post until Autumn half term and will work with the incoming executive headteacher to provide a smooth transition for partnership and federation. There have been no changes to teaching staff. However, two teachers are leaving in July. Due to a reduction in pupil numbers there will be a reduction from four to three classes in September 2017. Therefore only one new teacher has been appointed for September.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

- Leaders have responded promptly to the outcome of the previous inspection. They acknowledge the school's weaknesses and have put effective plans in place to address these. Their self-evaluation is much more accurate than at the time of the previous inspection because they check leaders' judgements much more carefully and provide a much higher level of challenge and accountability. Minutes from the transition board show, for example, that the board asked leaders to justify their judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders report on pupils' outcomes regularly. However, insufficient detail is provided about the progress that pupils are making. Trust executives have identified this weakness and have asked leaders to provide clearer reports showing, for example, how many pupils have made good progress and how many better than this in reading, writing and mathematics in each year group.
- The interim headteacher provides strong leadership for the school. She has created a sense of unity of purpose where everyone is determined to help the school to improve. Together with staff, she has created effective half-termly improvement plans which have rightly prioritised improving behaviour in order to establish a climate where teaching and learning can take place. These plans have clear milestones against which the board evaluates the school's journey towards improvement. However, the most recent half-term's plan does not give sufficient detail about how teaching and learning will be improved now that behaviour is

better across the school.

- The interim headteacher and members of the trust check the quality of teaching and learning regularly and so have an accurate view of their quality. However, middle leaders have too few opportunities to check on teaching and learning in their subjects and to identify where progress is too slow. As a result, they do not know if actions they are taking are proving effective.
- The review of the use of pupil premium funding has been effective in sharpening up plans for this. Leaders have a very clear idea of the barriers to learning for individuals and ensure that support is well matched to needs. For example, the head of school was able to talk in detail about the support provided for a most able disadvantaged pupil in developing confidence and self-esteem, as well as the curriculum support for some disadvantaged pupils who have fallen behind. This is helping to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils although, in common with other pupils, many are not making rapid enough progress to reach the standard expected of them.
- Leaders have ensured that there is an appropriate curriculum balance so that pupils enjoy learning across the full range of national curriculum subjects. Some examples of interesting and engaging tasks were evident during the inspection. For example, pupils in Year 6 were investigating strong structures and simulating the effect of an earthquake on their structures as part of design and technology work. Pupils worked together well and showed a high level of engagement in learning. Pupils talked about their enjoyment of subjects such as science and art. However, work in pupils' books shows that too often, work in subjects such as history and geography is not of a high enough standard because teachers do not expect enough of pupils. There is little evidence of pupils developing their skills and knowledge in a progressive way because learning is not planned to build on prior knowledge in these subjects.
- Parental confidence has improved. All parents spoken to during the inspection said that the school has improved. They particularly commented on the improvements in behaviour and in communication with them. A typical comment made was, 'We know what's going on now; we feel welcome.' This is because the interim headteacher has spoken with parents regularly. She meets parents each morning in the playground and parents are invited in for coffee and cake, and a chat with the interim headteacher after celebration assemblies. Regular newsletters are sent home which tell parents exactly what is working well, especially in relation to behaviour, and how parents can help to improve things.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- Some improvements in teaching and learning are evident, not least in that there is a settled atmosphere in classes. Pupils and teachers have positive relationships and the majority of pupils are quick to respond to teachers' directions, which was not the case at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers encourage pupils to have more positive learning behaviours, reminding pupils regularly about the

need for perseverance and resilience. This is beginning to have a positive impact on attitudes to learning.

- Teaching in mathematics has begun to improve, as shown by recent work in pupils' books. Teachers are providing opportunities for problem-solving and to develop pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts through pictorial representation. In English, the recent introduction of golden writing books is a positive development. They are beginning to show the higher standard of writing that pupils are capable of producing.
- In some classes, teaching assistants support pupils well. Some adults sensitively support individual pupils and ask questions which extend learning. However, some adults are not active enough or are too focused on checking behaviour rather than promoting learning.
- Teachers are beginning to use questioning to check what pupils know and have learned. However, teachers are not yet using assessment effectively to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers do not have a secure understanding of what is expected in each year group. This is shown by the assessments carried out which do not match closely enough the evidence in pupils' books. As a result, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils, especially for those of middle or high abilities. They accept, for example, work being unfinished or completed to a standard lower than they know the pupil is capable of. Support provided by the trust is beginning to improve teachers' knowledge of what pupils should know by the end of each year and so the accuracy of assessment, and its use to plan subsequent work, is beginning to improve. However, pupils' progress is still not rapid enough to enable them to catch up and to reach the expected standard.
- Provision in the early years is improving because support has been provided to improve adults' understanding of good early years provision. However, this support has been late in coming and, as a result, fewer than half of children in the Reception Year have reached a good level of development. This is because opportunities for developing children's early writing skills in particular have not been provided. Children have not been encouraged to write and make marks in a variety of different learning contexts. As a result, their writing skills are weak and a number of children are not well prepared for the Year 1 curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- Leaders have ensured that systems for keeping pupils safe are firmly established and that a strong culture of safeguarding has been established. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a child because training has been provided. Concerns forms are completed appropriately and leaders work with external agencies where necessary to ensure that action is taken. Pupils know about how to keep themselves safe, including online, because they learn about this in computing and other lessons.

- Leaders track attendance carefully and work with parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly. As a result, attendance of most pupils is regular and attendance rates are above the national average.
- Pupils' conduct has improved. Parents and pupils alike agree that this is the case. Pupils said that the 'good to be green' system has made a big difference because no one wants to lose their 'Dave time', which is the special activity provided on a Friday afternoon. Leaders follow up incidents rigorously and consistently so that pupils and their parents know the consequences of poor behaviour. Parents also say that pupils are treated fairly and that poor behaviour is not rewarded, which some felt was the case previously. Leaders have worked with external agencies to help develop effective strategies for managing the most challenging behaviour. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has decreased because of this consistent approach.
- In lessons, pupils mostly behave well. Some incidents of poor behaviour still occur but are dealt with appropriately. However, pupils do not demonstrate consistently good attitudes to learning. Some pupils give up when they perceive work to be too challenging or not interesting. Pupils sometimes do not work purposefully in lessons because teachers do not insist on this regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

- Pupils' outcomes remain too low. Less than half of children in the Reception Year reached a good level of development in 2017. Almost half of the pupils from Year 1 to Year 5 are below the expected standard for their year in mathematics and almost half from Years 1 to 6 below the expected standard for writing. This is because teaching has been ineffective in the past. While current teaching is improving, teachers are not wholly accurate in their assessments and so do not have a clear enough picture of what each child knows and needs to learn next.
- The most recent Year 2 results were particularly low in writing and mathematics. Year 6 outcomes were also particularly low in writing.
- Pupils' work confirms that pupils are not making the rapid progress needed to catch up on previous gaps in their learning, especially in writing and mathematics.
- In other subjects, pupils are not making good progress because teaching does not build on pupils' skills and develop these consistently over time. Too few opportunities are provided for developing pupils' literacy and mathematics skills through other subjects.

External support

- The academy trust has provided good support for the school. Academy staff visit frequently and evaluate the progress being made. The trust commissions additional support from, for example, the local authority and other consultants.

The trust commissioned the current interim headteacher and has brokered the forthcoming federation, with careful consideration for the school's particular circumstances. The trust has put sensible plans in place to allow for a smooth transition of leadership by having a phased handover. Financial support has been provided for the school to allow for this.

Next steps

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels maintain a sharper focus in plans and practice on what is being done to improve teaching and learning and what impact this is having on improving more rapidly the progress that pupils and groups of pupils are making
- teachers have high expectations of all pupils and set work at the right level for pupils by taking account of what they already know and can do, and what they need to learn next.