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3 January 2018

Mrs Vicky Matthews
Executive Headteacher
Ulceby St Nicholas Church of England Primary School
Church Lane
Ulceby
Lincolnshire
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Dear Mrs Matthews

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ulceby St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 December 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 previous monitoring inspection.

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

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Lincoln, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for North Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted

website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve safeguarding arrangements, by:
 - ironing out any confusion about accountability and putting in place effective arrangements to regularly check procedures and recording
 - thoroughly auditing all aspects of safeguarding policy and practice, then taking action to correct any shortcomings
 - ensuring that all staff and governors are trained to a better standard, updating training regularly and checking that all adults fully understand all of their duties.
- Improve leadership and governance, by:
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders carry out more regular and thorough checks on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning
 - strengthening improvement plans, identifying precise targets that can be measured at regular points throughout the school year
 - reviewing arrangements for governance, including the scheme of delegation
 - ensuring that governors are properly trained and that they receive more detailed information so they can challenge leaders more effectively.
- Further improve teaching so that pupils' outcomes improve, by:
 - bringing all teaching up to the quality of the best in the school
 - making sure that teachers identify the most able pupils and consistently give these pupils challenging work so more of them reach higher standards
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to routinely attempt really tricky problems in mathematics and to develop their reasoning skills
 - improving pupils' reading comprehension skills.
- Improve provision in the early years, by:
 - conducting more rigorous risk assessments
 - more fully involving parents in their children's learning and assessment
 - improving the quality of resources inside and outside and ensuring that children are challenged in their independent play and exploration.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 December 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher; the head of school; subject leaders; pupils; two members of the governing body, including the chair; and representatives from the Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust.

Context

Since the beginning of the academic year, you have appointed several new members of staff and a new head of school.

There have been several changes to the membership of the governing body including the appointment of a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body. A committee structure is now in place to better focus their work.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last inspection, leaders, including governors, have worked tirelessly to raise expectations and secure rapid improvement in all aspects of the school's work. Improvement is marked since the beginning of the academic year, following the appointment of new teaching staff and a new head of school.

The executive headteacher sets the very highest expectations for what pupils can and will achieve. She has a very clear and resolute vision for the future that all staff share. She is ably supported in her work by the recently appointed head of school. Together, they make a formidable team that share the same determination to remove the school from special measures swiftly and securely.

Assessment is now accurate. This means leaders' self-evaluation is precise and is based upon the rigorous checks made by leaders on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Development plans are detailed and actions to secure improvement are appropriate. Success measures are linked closely to pupils' outcomes at both the expected and higher standards. Milestones for achievement enable leaders to measure the success of their work at regular intervals throughout the school year. They do this effectively. While action plans remain fit for purpose, leaders are now at the stage where they need to refine their checks on teaching and learning, so that their efforts are more focused upon the specific needs of the school moving forward.

Middle leadership is developing strongly because of the high-quality training and support that leaders receive. They fulfil their roles with great enthusiasm and are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and learning. Early signs are positive, particularly in mathematics, but it is too early in the school year to

measure the effect of their work fully.

The wider curriculum is developing quickly. Topics are chosen carefully, so that meaningful links are made between subjects. 'Key' questions provide the stimulus for pupils' study. Although this approach is only in its first term, pupils observed during the inspection were fully engaged in their learning and were proud of their achievements. Leaders are already evaluating the impact of this new approach. They recognise that further adjustments will ensure even greater alignment between subjects to develop pupils' subject-specific skills further.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders have maintained their focus upon ensuring that procedures and documentation comply with statutory requirements. Staff training is completed regularly and any required updates are shared in a timely manner. All staff are fully aware of the important role they play in keeping pupils safe. Record-keeping is detailed and good links with external agencies are improving the school's work in this area.

Changes to governance took place swiftly following the last inspection and the external review of their work has helped to focus governors' efforts. A detailed action plan is now in place, which identifies the main areas of their work to develop further. The new governors bring helpful skills and expertise, which are improving the work of the wider governing body further. Governors are fully involved in monitoring the work of the school, which makes them better informed and confident to challenge school leaders more rigorously. They access training to ensure that their skills are relevant and up to date. This means that governors are now in a position to regain their full statutory powers.

Leaders are engaging with parents and carers more readily. The school's own consultation with parents shows that they are overwhelmingly positive about the changes that have taken place in the school. Parents welcome the opportunities they now have to contribute fully to their children's learning and to be involved in the life of the school.

Leaders benefit from effective support and challenge from the Lincolnshire Anglican Academy Trust. Regular reviews ensure that there is a relentless focus upon improving the quality of teaching and learning. Trust representatives recognise that there is a need to adapt development plans to better reflect the actions needing to be moved forward.

Leaders are now more outward facing. They value the support and advice they receive from several local schools' partnerships. This enables staff to share good practice more widely and is supporting the school's improvement successfully.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the last inspection, leaders have invested heavily in providing quality training and professional development to all staff. Teachers and teaching assistants have embraced the opportunities offered to them and are keen to develop their practice further. This is securing an open and innovative culture in the school for the future.

Leaders have introduced a consistent approach to the teaching of writing which focuses upon using quality texts to stimulate pupils, particularly boys, to write. 'Key' language features are highlighted within story extracts and pupils then practise the associated spelling and grammar skills before applying them in their own writing. Pupils' books show strengthening progress towards the expected standards. However, there is less evidence of pupils working at the higher standards, which leaders have already identified as an area for further improvement.

A new feedback policy has been implemented so that teachers can help pupils improve their work. Teachers in all year groups and subjects use this policy consistently. Its use is impacting positively upon improving pupils' progress. Pupils in all year groups understand how to respond and say teachers' feedback is enabling them to improve their work effectively.

The approach to the teaching of mathematics which was introduced following the last inspection is now securely in place. Pupils' books demonstrate that they are secure in formal arithmetic methods and are increasingly confident in applying them to reasoning and problem-solving activities. Quality training and support offered by the subject leader and the many detailed checks that are completed regularly are supporting these improvements. As a result, pupils' outcomes in mathematics are improving strongly.

Across the school, pupils' books, in all subjects, reflect the high expectations for pupils to work hard and to do their best. All activities are given a very clear learning intention, which enables pupils to know exactly what to do and how they will be successful. This is a tremendous improvement since the time of the last inspection.

Phonics teaching is improving. A consistent approach was introduced at the start of the school year. Staff are becoming increasingly confident in using the new resources and early assessment information shows that pupils are acquiring their phonic skills effectively.

Additional sessions for the teaching of comprehension skills are beginning to impact upon pupils' progress and are enabling pupils to develop their higher order reading skills further. Leaders are encouraged by the improvements, but acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils can achieve at the higher standards consistently.

Assessment information is used to identify the needs of individual pupils effectively. A range of intervention activities are in place to support pupils to catch up in their

learning. Pupils were completing formal assessments during the inspection; leaders were cautiously optimistic that pupils are now making good gains in their learning. This is endorsed by the work seen in pupils' books.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils in all year groups demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They are keen to share what they have been doing and are taking greater pride in the presentation of their work.

The vast majority of pupils demonstrate good manners. They are polite and readily hold doors open and say 'good morning'. Their conduct in lessons and around school is orderly and purposeful.

Pupils contributed to the school's new behaviour policy, which was introduced at the start of the school year. As a result, pupils live up to the expectations they set for themselves and any incidents of poor behaviour are rare. When they do occur, leaders deal with them effectively and sensitively.

Overall, attendance dipped in 2016 and persistent absenteeism, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, increased slightly. This is due, for the most part, to holidays taken during term time, which historically had been approved. This is no longer the case and leaders have now introduced rigorous systems to monitor absence closely. As a result, current attendance figures are showing marked improvement and compare favourably to those found nationally for primary schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes in the end-of-key-stage-2 tests and assessments in 2017 improved considerably upon those of the previous years. A greater proportion of pupils reached the expected and higher standard in writing and mathematics compared with the national averages. In reading, more pupils reached the expected standard than found nationally, but fewer pupils reached the higher standard. Pupils' progress also improved and was broadly average for all subjects. This was a marked improvement from the previous year.

The same improvements were not replicated at key stage 1 and pupils' outcomes declined in reading, writing and mathematics and were below national averages. This represents inadequate progress from pupils' starting points. Leaders acknowledge that staff absence and weak teaching contributed to this and have appointed new staff from the start of the school year. Pupils' books already show that progress for those pupils currently in key stage 1 is accelerating well.

Outcomes in the phonics screening check also declined in 2017, particularly for boys. Leaders have introduced a new approach and invested in considerable staff training to secure better phonics teaching. Early signs would indicate that pupils are

acquiring their skills confidently and securely and are catching up quickly.

Assessment information for all other year groups indicates a strengthening picture of pupils' achievement in mathematics in key stage 2. However, there is greater variability in pupils' outcomes in reading and writing, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard. Leaders have an honest appreciation of the historical assessment information and are working tirelessly to increase the rates of progress for those pupils who have fallen behind in their learning.

There are very few disadvantaged pupils in the school and their outcomes are variable. Leaders acknowledge that disadvantaged pupils' progress needs to improve, so that more pupils can reach the higher standards.

There is a greater proportion of pupils in the school who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities than that found nationally. In 2017, none of these pupils reached the expected or high standard in reading or writing. Very few did so in mathematics at key stages 1 and 2. Leaders have organised a raft of intervention activities and additional support to enable pupils to accelerate their progress. It is too early to determine the full impact of leaders' actions.

Leaders have set aspirational targets for pupils' achievement at both the expected and the higher standard for the current school year. They include measures for accelerated progress, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Early years

The proportion of children reaching a good level of development was close to the national average in 2017. This was an improvement upon previous years and represents typical progress for children from their starting points. Given that teaching staff changed during the academic year, this is a tremendous achievement.

The vast majority of children enter the school with skills typical for their age and stage of development and approximately a quarter of the children enter the school with skills exceeding those which are typically expected. Analysis of this assessment information shows that girls start the school with skills, particularly in reading and writing, that are more advanced than those of the boys. Leaders are using this information to adjust planned activities, so they are more appealing to boys.

Significant training and investment is supporting staff in Reception to improve their skills. This is paying dividends, as staff are now more confident in extending children's play and in using their questioning skills to extend children's learning and probe their thinking. As a result, children observed in Reception were absorbed in their learning and sustaining their interest in activities.

The indoor environment is brightly displayed and resources are highly appropriate

and accessible for children. Leaders are working tirelessly to ensure the outdoor environment matches that of the indoors and are making great strides to improve the quality of activities offered outside. This bodes well for the future.

Routines are well established and strong bonds are quickly formed, which means that children quickly settle into Reception and their behaviour is exemplary. Leaders ensure that the conditions for learning are well established and have set challenging targets for the proportion of children able to achieve a good level of development by the end of the school year.

External support

The Lincolnshire Anglican Academy Trust is providing quality support to school leaders, who are benefiting from this.