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Emma Zeil
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Dear Mrs Zeil

Special measures monitoring inspection of Runcton Holme Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 September 2018, 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 2017.

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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Ely, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2017.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - using the information gained from regular assessments of pupils' progress to plan learning suited to the different ages and abilities of pupils in mixed-age classes
 - making regular checks to ensure that all pupils understand what they have to do and are learning effectively
 - maximising the time available in lessons so pupils start work promptly and have time to complete all of their work
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are deployed effectively in all lessons to teach and support pupils' learning effectively.
- Raise achievement throughout all key stages by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils are capable of attaining
 - providing clear guidance for the teaching of mathematics and monitoring the impact that this has on accelerating pupils' progress
 - strengthening the teaching of spelling and grammar, so that pupils acquire the essential skills needed to improve their writing
 - implementing new procedures to teach phonics systematically in the early years foundation stage, so that children acquire a thorough grounding in reading.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - incorporating the actions needed to tackle the areas for improvement noted during this inspection into the school's improvement plan
 - adding key milestones into the action plan to check that improvements are being made at a suitable rate and that the school improves quickly
 - strengthening governance to enable the governing body to carry out all its duties effectively
 - ensuring that the trust provides the headteacher and governors with regular, accurate evaluations of the school's performance and seeks ways of providing the headteacher with additional leadership to help her to secure improvements
 - ensuring that the school's website is fully compliant.

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 first monitoring inspection on 19 September 2018 to 20 September 2018

Evidence

I met with you, all teachers and teaching assistants, the Holy Cross Federation of Schools special educational needs coordinator, the chair of the governing body, one group of pupils, the office manager, the Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust (the trust) school improvement director and the director of trust development. I evaluated a wide range of documentation to determine the work of the school since the previous inspection. I also held phone discussions with the trust chief executive officer, and with a national leader of governance who has been working with the school. I took account of the views of parents who spoke with me in the school playground. I also considered the views of pupils I spoke with at playtime and lunchtime. Together with you, I scrutinised a large proportion of pupils' work in their books and folders.

Context

The school serves the rural community of Runcton Holme and surrounding villages. Together with Wormegay Primary School, the school forms the Holy Cross Federation Schools. The schools share one governing body and one headteacher.

Runcton Holme Church of England Primary School provides education for 46 pupils, the large majority of whom are White British. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is lower than the national average.

There has been little change to the teaching and non-teaching staff since the section 5 inspection. A post of leader of English has been created and the lead teacher from the federated school has taken up some leadership responsibility at Runcton Holme Church of England Primary School

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable alterations made to the early years outdoor learning environment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You, governors and the trust are working effectively together to bring about necessary improvements to the school. Staff and parents told me how they value your clarity and obvious determination to achieve your aim of providing at least a good quality of education. Staff are wholly supportive of your work and explained how you have successfully developed a sense of togetherness and team work. Staff also explained how they value the increased levels of guidance and support provided by the trust.

In your well-thought-out development plan, you have prioritised each area for improvement and have identified key milestones which help you to check that improvements are being made at a suitable rate. Governors and the trust are also carefully checking the progress being made towards these priorities. Inspection evidence confirms the accuracy of your evaluation that while the quality of education is improving, in some areas progress has not been as rapid or as consistent as you would like.

The trust and local governing body are responding appropriately to the findings of an external review of governance. In response to this, the trust has amended the governance structure to ensure that statutory governance duties are carried out. This amendment has also allowed members of the governing body to focus more clearly on monitoring your work to bring about improvements to the quality of education. Despite your considerable, wide-ranging and ongoing efforts to recruit more governors, you have had limited success in doing so. Governors still have too great a breadth of responsibilities. While a new governor with considerable primary education experience is due to join the governing body in the coming weeks, increasing the size of the governing body rightly remains a priority.

Governors have a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors take heed of the trust's detailed and accurate evaluations of the quality of education and visit the school to check improvements for themselves. Working with a national leader of governance, governors are more confident and effective in challenging leaders about the progress that pupils make. However, governors do not check pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. The trust continues to provide governors with support such as ensuring that the school's website is fully compliant. The trust has plans to provide additional training so that the quality of governance continues to improve.

The trust is providing you with increased resources to help secure improvements. As well as the additional leadership support you receive, the trust's school effectiveness officers are working with your staff to make changes in early years and to the teaching of English and mathematics. Through this work the quality of provision in the early years and in English and mathematics is improving.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, while better, remains too inconsistent within and across key stages, including in the early years.

You have made clear your expectations of high-quality teaching, learning and assessment and have successfully raised adults' expectations of what pupils can attain. Staff take care to consider pupils' prior attainment when planning sequences of learning, particularly in English and mathematics. However, inspection evidence demonstrates that teachers are still getting to grips with some of the changes you have introduced. For example, while adults are checking pupils' understanding, they

are not consistently confident or effective in using this information to adapt learning in a timely way. As one teacher commented, 'It is not second nature yet.' Consequently, some pupils who have gaps in their learning, brought about by previous disrupted teaching, are not making the rapid progress needed to ensure that they quickly catch up.

With appropriate support from the trust, you have adjusted how mathematics is taught. Teachers value the training and clear guidance provided by the trust's school effectiveness officer. Teachers plan logical sequences of learning designed to increase pupils' confidence and fluency in using their knowledge and skills of mathematics.

Where teachers implement these learning sequences well, pupils are making better progress. Pupils told me how they are having to think more deeply in their mathematics lessons. Your new approach to teaching mathematics is starting to bring about better outcomes. This is evident in the modest improvements in pupil achievement in key stages 1 and 2 in 2018 and in the better progress that current pupils are making. However, the rate of improvement remains uneven as teachers develop their confidence in delivering these approaches.

You have made necessary changes to how spelling and grammar are taught. Through the support of the trust, teachers clearly understand what is expected of them when teaching writing. Teachers are providing learning activities that help pupils to understand more deeply the process of writing and to use spelling and grammar with more accuracy. Evidence in pupils' books shows that, although the impact is variable, pupils are becoming more confident writers. Together with you, I saw evidence of some pupils' increasingly accomplished writing and improved accuracy in the use of both spelling and grammar. Evidence from pupils' work indicates that they are, typically, able to complete the work that is set for them and that they are taking more care in how their work is presented.

Evidence from current pupils' reading and writing, including of those in the early years, and from the 2018 published outcomes indicates that your new procedures for teaching phonics are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. In 2018, all Year 1 pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check. There was also a significant increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard and working at greater depth in reading by the end of key stage 1 in 2018.

You have ensured that teaching assistants are more effectively deployed in lessons. Parents told me how much these adults' support is helping their children's confidence and learning. Teaching assistants are knowledgeable about the pupils they work with and provide them precise and effective guidance in their learning. Consequently, these pupils are making improved progress in the key subjects of English and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

At the time of the previous inspection it was noted that pupils behave well. This remains the case.

Pupils told me that they feel safe, enjoy coming to school and have friends of all ages within the school. Pupils also explained that if they had any concerns they would be comfortable speaking with adults in school. Relationships are typically harmonious and reflect the school values of caring and family. Mealtimes are sociable and good-humoured occasions in which pupils mix easily and well with their classmates and adults.

Pupils make enthusiastic use of the wide range of play equipment on the school field. They look out for each other and are keen that none of their friends are left out of their games. Pupils told me that on the rare occasions when play can become too boisterous there is always an adult available to sort it out quickly.

Adults support the small number of pupils who find it difficult to make the correct behaviour choices well. Consequently, these pupils' behaviour quickly improves.

You and your office staff carefully check each pupil's attendance regularly and often. If a pupil's attendance gives you cause for concern you successfully use a range of appropriate strategies to make sure that their attendance improves. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent, which was too high in 2017, has reduced dramatically and is now lower than that found nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2017, by the end of key stages 1 and 2 pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics were low. However, the impact of your work is evident in the improvements pupils' achievement in 2018. For example, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 increased. There were also improvements elsewhere as all pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1. Even so, pupils still did not achieve the standards they should overall. This was the case in each key stage and also in the early years.

You have made sure that teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing are more accurate. This information, as well as evidence from pupils' work, indicates that the impact is starting to bear fruit. Inspection evidence demonstrates that although, for current pupils, standards are rising in English and mathematics, the rate of improvement is still not consistent and sufficiently rapid.

The progress that pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics is not improving quickly enough. This is because you have focused your efforts on bringing about improvements in English and mathematics.

External support

You and your leaders have made effective use of external experts to support the development of early years, governance and to validate teachers' judgements about pupils' progress. The impact of this support can be seen in the considerable improvements made to the early years outdoor learning environment, the better-quality governance and the increased accuracy of teachers' assessments.