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Mrs Tracey Marsh
Principal
St Columba Church of England Primary Academy
Tewkesbury Avenue
Fareham
Hampshire
PO15 6LL

Dear Mrs Marsh

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Columba Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2019, 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 February 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Portsmouth and Winchester Diocesan Academies Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Portsmouth and Winchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Lambert
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2019

- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby outcomes across the school by ensuring that teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including in the presentation of their work
 - provide work that is consistently challenging and well matched to pupils' current knowledge and skills, particularly for most-able pupils and disadvantaged pupils
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to reason mathematically and to tackle problems that require them to apply the mathematics they have learned
 - develop pupils' love of reading and check regularly that they are reading books suited to their ability, moving them on as soon as it is clear they are ready.
- Improve leadership and management by making sure that:
 - leaders at all levels, including governors and the academy trust, understand their roles clearly so that they can work together to drive necessary improvements
 - systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' achievement provide an accurate picture of how well groups of pupils are achieving, so that leaders and teachers can intervene swiftly to accelerate progress where needed
 - governors are provided with regular, accurate information about pupils' progress so that they can hold senior leaders closely to account
 - improvement plans contain measurable success criteria by which leaders at all levels can be held stringently to account
 - communication with parents is improved to regain their confidence.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that:
 - all staff tackle inappropriate behaviour, derogatory language and bullying consistently and decisively
 - all pupils who are involved in incidents of poor behaviour are treated justly and fairly
 - records of poor behaviour are recorded systematically, so that leaders can evaluate the impact of their actions and target further improvements.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 September 2019

Evidence

Alongside leaders, I visited lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, subject leaders and groups of pupils. I reviewed the views of parents submitted to Ofsted via the Parent View website. I met with an officer from the Diocese of Portsmouth and Winchester and the chief executive officer and a director of the Portsmouth and Winchester Diocesan Academies Trust.

Context

Since the previous inspection, six teachers and two members of support staff have left the school. Experienced staff have been recruited, many starting their roles in September 2019.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked hard with staff to rectify the areas of weakness in the school. Teachers and support staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Leaders and governors track pupils' behaviour with greater precision. This helps them to identify and address issues before they grow. Incidents of violence, bullying and bad language have reduced. This means pupils feel happier and safer in school. Improved teaching of handwriting and expectations of presentation mean pupils are taking greater pride in their work and learning. They were keen to show off their efforts during the inspection. However, incidents of calling out and silly behaviour are still too common in class.

Staff have reviewed the mathematics curriculum and agreed a common approach to teaching calculation. They carefully order series of lessons so that pupils gradually develop, and remember, what they have learned. Teachers pay close attention to pupils' performance and use this to identify and address gaps in their understanding. As a result, pupils, including the most able, are developing a stronger grasp of the key skills in mathematics and use these to solve challenging problems.

The phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) curriculum has improved. Pupils now learn their sounds in a more logical sequence and practise these with staff in class. This helps them to recall sounds quickly and to sound out whole words. Pupils who fall behind quickly catch up because staff have been trained to identify and support these pupils. The books that pupils take home now match the sounds they already know and are learning that week so that they rehearse them regularly. As a result, they are developing the skills they need to become successful readers.

The wider curriculum is not as well planned as that for English and mathematics. Many subject leaders are new to post and have not yet thought about what pupils need to know and understand. Some staff do not possess the subject knowledge to deliver a suitably ambitious curriculum. As a result, pupils' knowledge of the arts, science and humanities is weak.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Leaders are ambitious for the school and its pupils. Working closely with multi-academy trust officers and staff, they have identified the key priorities for the school to focus upon. Improvements in behaviour, phonics and mathematics have, rightly, been the highest priority. Improvement plans are shared widely and their progress checked by governors and directors from the trust. As a result, staff, governors and trustees possess a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the actions they need to take to improve the school.

Professional development has been used well. This is provided by a range of organisations including local authority officers and local teaching schools. Staff have improved their subject knowledge and have a better understanding of how to deliver the school's curriculum in phonics and mathematics. Staff understand how to use the tracking systems to identify gaps in pupils' understanding. Because leaders give consistent messages, staff are all pulling in the same direction.

Governors now provide more effective challenge and support for leaders. They work alongside officers from the multi-academy trust to identify areas where the school needs to do better and direct resources towards this. Governors now ask for, and receive, clear and detailed information on pupils' performance. This helps them to identify any groups of pupils who are underperforming and challenge leaders to provide further support.

Leaders have worked hard to improve their relationship with parents. They have relaunched the school website and newsletters to provide parents with clearer information. Leaders share news and events on social media, which is widely accessed and appreciated by parents. The vast majority of respondents to the Ofsted Parent View survey felt communication has improved.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Pupils have increased their knowledge of phonics and mathematics. This is because staff's subject knowledge has improved and they sequence lessons in a way that builds on pupils' previous learning.
- Improvements in behaviour have ensured that pupils feel safe.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Subject leaders have not planned or developed an ambitious curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics. Teaching and support staff do not possess the subject knowledge to teach a wide range of subjects effectively.
- Calling out and low-level disruption are still too common in class.

External support

The multi-academy trust has secured effective support from the local authority and other schools. This has helped staff to understand how to plan, teach and assess phonics and mathematics. The local authority has provided training for governors on evaluating the school's use of the pupil premium. This has enabled governors to effectively allocate additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils.