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Mrs Lynsey Mitchell
Sowerby Village Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
St Peter's Avenue
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sowerby Village Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 December 2019, 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 June 2019.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Director of Education

for the Diocese of Leeds (Church of England), the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Calderdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of leadership, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - plans for improvement are focused on the most pressing priorities and have precise measures of success
 - the quality of teaching is checked thoroughly so that areas requiring support and training are identified swiftly, leading to more rapid improvement
 - the impact of leaders' actions, for example to support disadvantaged pupils' achievement, is evaluated sharply so that strategies become increasingly effective
 - pupils' reading is an ongoing priority for development and that teachers have the necessary subject knowledge to teach reading effectively
 - middle leaders are supported to become effective in their responsibilities
 - there is a comprehensive induction programme for new staff
 - swift action is taken to meet the needs of all pupils with SEND
 - there are rapid improvements in pupils' behaviour and a reduction in fixed-term exclusions and the use of discriminatory language
 - the curriculum, in English and mathematics in particular, is sufficiently challenging and is sequenced so that pupils build and develop their understanding over time
 - all concerns about pupils' safety and welfare are acted upon with rigour and are recorded effectively so that pupils are protected from potential harm
 - safeguarding training is effective in alerting staff to possible signs of concern
 - governors understand their responsibilities and hold leaders stringently to account.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make consistently good progress across a wide range of subjects, especially reading, by ensuring that:
 - curriculum plans provide teachers with clarity about the intended learning in each subject
 - teachers demonstrate high expectations of what pupils achieve by designing learning activities which help pupils consolidate their knowledge or deepen their understanding
 - there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics, including plentiful reading practice, so that all pupils learn to read with fluency as soon as

possible

- additional support for pupils falling behind in the phonic programme helps these pupils to catch up quickly
- in the early stages of reading, pupils' books match the sounds they know and the words to which they have been exposed
- pupils have regular opportunities to read across the curriculum
- pupils develop accurate letter formation so their handwriting can develop well
- support for pupils with SEND is tailored effectively to meet their needs
- ongoing assessment is used effectively to identify what pupils know, understand and can do, so that gaps in their learning can be addressed swiftly.

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

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 17 December 2019 to 18 December 2019

Evidence

I observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. I met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, governors, the leader for English, the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) leader and a representative from the local authority. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese. I spoke to pupils in lessons and looked at their work. I observed pupils reading to familiar adults. I checked the arrangements for safeguarding.

Context

This was the first monitoring visit since the school's section 5 inspection in June 2019. The leadership team was strengthened in September 2019. An executive headteacher works with the school for two days a week. A teacher has been seconded from another school to act as assistant headteacher. Two established teachers have taken on additional responsibility: one as leader for English and the other as the leader for SEND.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders have worked to improve the teaching of reading across the school. Although this has led to considerable improvement, there is still a lot more work to do. Training for teachers and teaching assistants has improved their subject knowledge. However, some still do not fully understand the importance of pronouncing the sounds that letters represent precisely. New plans for phonics set out what pupils should learn in each term. However, work on the sounds that letters represent does not start until halfway through the autumn term in Reception. Leaders need to be more ambitious for these children. Most children are ready to start this work as soon as they enter Reception.

Leaders have thought carefully about the books that pupils use in the early stage of learning to read. They have reorganised existing books and bought new ones. The books pupils read in school are now generally well matched to their phonics knowledge. This is helping most pupils to develop the skills they need to become fluent readers. However, the books that pupils take home to practise reading are not always as well matched.

Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 have three targets to aim towards to improve their reading. Most pupils are aware of these targets and can talk about how they are working towards achieving at least one of them. However, in some classes, pupils' targets need to be more carefully matched to their needs.

Leaders are working to promote a love of reading. Teachers regularly read to their classes. Each classroom has a reading area. Staff have involved pupils in making these attractive and inviting. Pupils also monitor the use each class makes of them. Staff encourage pupils to read at home and reward them when they do.

Some teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They check pupils' work carefully during and after lessons. They usually pick up errors and misconceptions quickly and address them well. However, this is not always the case. Too often, teachers miss errors in spelling, punctuation and handwriting. This is leading to the reinforcement of bad habits.

Leaders are keen to improve handwriting across the school. They have decided to stop teaching cursive handwriting in Reception. This makes it easier for some children to form letters correctly. However, all teachers need to carefully model and check how pupils form letters throughout the school.

Leaders have introduced a new scheme of work to support improvements in the teaching of mathematics. This has made sure that work is well sequenced. This helps most pupils to build on their knowledge and skills. Pupils now have lots of opportunities to develop their skills in reasoning and problem solving. However, there is more work to do to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Some pupils, even in upper key stage 2, do not form numbers correctly.

Pupils are able to study a wide range of subjects. Leaders are aware that there is a lot of work to do to make sure that work in many subjects is well planned and sequenced. They have meetings planned with other local schools for the spring term. They hope to work together to create a curriculum that helps pupils to know more and remember more, year on year.

Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. However, many pupils do not concentrate well in lessons. They do not always try their best. Most pupils seem to get along well with each other at breaktimes. They have lots of equipment to use. This gives them something to do and keeps them active. Most inappropriate behaviour is low level and is dealt with well by staff. However, there are still some pupils involved in more serious incidents that lead to fixed-term exclusion. These incidents do not appear to be included in the school's tracking of behaviour. This means that a true picture of behaviour trends over time is not clear.

The provision for pupils with SEND has improved. Teachers now understand the steps they need to take to support pupils in their learning before they turn to the SEND leader for support. This means that the leader can target her support where it will have the most impact. Clear plans are in place showing the additional support that pupils with SEND receive. The use of well-thought-out resources such as word mats is helping these pupils. They are beginning to be able to work alongside their peers with increased independence.

Preparations are under way for the school's transition to academy status. Current plans show that the school will join Trinity Academy Halifax. The school plans to do this by September 2020.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are acting to address all the areas for improvement from the last inspection. The school development plan lists clear actions. It states by when they should be complete. However, success criteria are not always measurable. They do not always match the areas for improvement precisely enough. Leaders have evaluated the progress they have made over this term. This evaluation shows that some success criteria for the autumn term have not been fully met. This means that leaders need to redraft their plan for the rest of the year to reflect this.

Leaders are making sure that staff have effective training in the areas they need to improve. Most staff have welcomed this support. They share leaders' ambition to improve. Leaders now regularly monitor teaching and learning. This work is focused and clearly sets out what teachers need to do to improve further. However, leaders do not always record the discussions they have with teachers about this improvement. This makes it difficult to see how teachers take responsibility for their own development.

Governors still do not accept the judgement from the last inspection. However, their own monitoring has identified many things that they believe leaders need to address to improve the school. These match many of the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection. They know that securing a permanent senior leadership team is something they need to address. Governors insist that they hold leaders to account for their actions through questioning. However, this is not evident in the minutes of governors' meetings. Questioning is superficial and does not lead to professional debate. There has not been an external review of governance. Leaders have no plans to do this.

There has not been an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium. However, leaders have secured funding to address this in the spring term.

Leaders acted swiftly to address concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding. They have introduced an effective system to check the effectiveness of training. Leaders are now sure that all staff understand how to recognise potential risks. Records show that vulnerable pupils are well supported. A minor administrative issue with the single central record was dealt with quickly during this inspection.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' actions to improve teaching of English and mathematics have had a positive impact on teaching and learning. The planning and sequencing of work have improved.
- Work to improve the teaching of phonics is helping more pupils to develop the skills they need to become fluent readers.
- Pupils with SEND are increasingly well supported.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Governors do not fully accept the judgement and, together with leaders, do not always act as quickly as they might to secure the quality of teaching.
- Not all staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils know that they can get away with work which is less than their best.
- Work to help pupils to understand unfamiliar words and phrases is not always effective.

External support

Following the last inspection, the local authority acted to strengthen leadership in the school. An executive headteacher has been working in the school for two days each week. A teacher has been seconded from another school to act as assistant headteacher. This has been effective in supporting the headteacher to improve the quality of education in the school.

Since the last inspection, the local authority has carried out two reviews of the school. A representative for the diocese has been present at each review. These reviews have helped leaders to see the progress they are making to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection. They also make it clear what they should do next.