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Becky Fairhead
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Dear Miss Fairhead

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southminster Church of England Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 6 and 7 December 2022, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in July 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the multi-academy trust and members of the trust improvement board the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also reviewed the school's single central record, scrutinised safeguarding documents, visited lessons, met with pupils and staff and reviewed a range of curriculum documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Southminster Church of England Primary School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

There have been considerable changes in leadership since the previous graded inspection. You, in your role as deputy director of education for the trust, have led the school in the absence of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Two new senior leaders are supporting you. The trust has established a 'trust improvement board'. The board has taken over the role of governance in the school following the previous inspection. The special educational needs coordinator has been seconded from a school outside of the trust.

Leaders are resolute in their determination to improve the school. They are taking the right actions in the right order and at the right time. They do not focus on 'quick fixes', but on establishing solid foundations to build on. This strategy is proving successful. The culture of the school is changing, with a shared understanding between all staff that pupils need to be 'safe, respectful and ready'.

The curriculum has been overhauled since the previous inspection. Leaders have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember and the order the curriculum will be taught in. They provide effective support for teachers to design lessons to help pupils learn well. Although they are still refining the specific detail in many subjects, the full national curriculum is now being covered. Reading is now rightly prioritised. Leaders have put in place an ambitious programme to teach the youngest pupils phonics. This is in the early stages of implementation. Staff have received effective training. However, some still need further support to ensure they provide appropriate help for the weakest readers.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), especially those who previously were in the 'nurture unit', are no longer left to flounder. The needs of these pupils are now identified accurately. The strategies that staff use to help to meet these needs are detailed effectively in pupils' learning plans.

Despite these significant improvements, many pupils have substantial gaps in their knowledge due to the weak curriculum learned previously. Some pupils cannot read fluently and therefore do not fully understand what they are reading. Leaders are, however, designing a curriculum to address these issues.

The trust's 'team around the school' approach to driving improvement is paying dividends. This approach ensures that the senior leaders with the right knowledge are focused on supporting the right aspects. The trust's safeguarding lead, for example, is tasked with training and supporting the school's new designated safeguarding leads. Consequently, the rapid improvements in the school's safeguarding arrangements are being sustained because school leaders are now more skilled in their roles.

Improvement planning is precise. The trust improvement board keeps a close eye on how well the weak aspects of the school are improving. The board includes members with the right knowledge and experience to hold trust and school leaders to account. As a result,

leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to bring about sustainable improvement in the school.

At the previous graded inspection, safeguarding was found to be ineffective. The main concerns have been swiftly addressed and significantly improved. Systems for checking on pupils who do not attend school are established. Phone calls and, if needed, home visits are common practice. Staff are well trained to know how to report any concerns they have about pupils' welfare. Leaders follow up these concerns. The actions taken are appropriate and well recorded. Robust safeguarding systems and processes are now in place to keep pupils safe. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They know what to do if they have a problem. Many pupils who need extra support to help them to behave well now receive this. Safeguarding is now effective.

School leaders have welcomed the external support provided by the local authority. This has focused sharply on supporting the provision for pupils with SEND and improving attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Vine Schools multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Lowe
His Majesty's Inspector