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Chris Read
Interim headteacher
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Dear Mr Read

Special measures monitoring inspection of Middleton Church of England Primary Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 29 and 30 March 2023, 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 May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the multi-academy trust, trustees and members of local governing body 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.

Middleton Church of England Primary Academy 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

You, in your role as interim headteacher, have led the school since September 2022. There have been no other staff changes since the previous inspection. You have set about taking the right actions to bring about sustained improvement with a calm and measured approach. Staff and pupils welcome the support and stability you bring to the school. The trust has established an 'improvement group', which oversees the progress the school is making.

Leaders are resolute in their determination to improve the school. You and your team are taking the right actions, in the right order and at the right time. You do not focus on 'quick fixes', but on establishing solid foundations to build on. This strategy is proving successful.

The curriculum has been redesigned and now sets out what pupils need to know, remember and to be able to do and by the end of each unit of learning in most subjects. Despite these significant improvements, many older pupils have substantial gaps in their knowledge due to the weak curriculum learned previously. Leaders are continuing their work to add greater precision to their curriculum design. They are carefully mapping out the exact knowledge pupils need to learn and how this will build on what they already know. This is an ongoing project that will take more time to get right.

The support that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive is now much better than in the past. You have put in place a consistent way of recording and reviewing the targets for pupils with SEND. Often, this has led to the support these pupils receive becoming increasingly precise. However, this is still a work in progress. Some pupils with SEND do not consistently receive well-tailored support in the classroom. The activities planned are not adapted to best help them to learn the ambitious curriculum you now have in place.

Children in the early years learn well. The vibrant learning environment, strengthened curriculum and skilled adults help children to learn much about the world around them. The well-established routines ensure little time is wasted. Adults take every opportunity to help children to learn and to use new words. This supports them as they take their first steps in learning to read. Your reading leader knows exactly where pupils are on the early reading programme because assessment is regular and thorough. If a pupil needs extra help, they receive this quickly. The books pupils read are well matched to their ability. The weaknesses in the early years and in reading, which were identified in the previous inspection, have improved significantly.

Improvement planning is precise. Leaders do not over-complicate things. They focus on aspects that will make the biggest difference to pupils and set about making them better. The improvement group keeps a close eye on how well the weak aspects of the school are improving. The group 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 school.

The trust provides valuable support. In the past, some essential school systems were not in place, or not working well, such as how staff report on and manage pupils' behaviour. These concerns have been fixed. As a result, behaviour in school is much improved. Staff receive useful guidance and support to provide well for pupils who need help to improve their behaviour. Staff also benefit from the wide range of training and support offered through the trust. They value the guidance from the trust's academy group executive principal who makes regular visits to support them in developing their practice.

Trust leaders support school leaders effectively to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence. This is gradually building leadership capacity in school. However, capacity is still evolving. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the changes they have been part of since the previous inspection. You have created a supportive and warm culture, where staff feel valued. However, you do not shy away from challenging staff to be even better.

School leaders have welcomed the external support provided by the local authority. This has focused sharply on supporting the provision for pupils with SEND. The local English hub has also provided much welcomed support to further improve the quality of reading across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Nathan Lowe
His Majesty's Inspector