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Becky Fairhead
Interim headteacher
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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 19 and 20 April 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 second 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, Nicola Shadbolt, Ofsted Inspector, and 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 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 am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous monitoring inspection, in December 2022, you have formally taken up the role of interim headteacher, while continuing to carry out your role as deputy director

of education for the trust. The school has appointed a permanent special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who started her role in January 2023, along with appointing a new teacher who leads the early years team. This teacher joined the school in April 2023.

You continue to lead the school with a steely determination that all pupils receive the quality of education they deserve. The firm foundations that you laid in your first term in the role are now being securely built on. Currently, these significant improvements have been brought about by a small number of highly skilled individuals. Although improving, leadership capacity is underdeveloped.

The work to fully develop the curriculum continues apace. In several subjects, leaders have worked alongside teachers to precisely set out the knowledge, skills and important vocabulary pupils need to know and by when. Teachers are clear on what pupils need to learn in subjects such as history, geography and art. Pupils enjoy lessons in these subjects and remember much of what they learn currently. In several other subjects, this detailed review of the curriculum is in the early stages. Many older pupils continue to have significant gaps in their knowledge.

The youngest children now learn to read well because the school's phonics programme is becoming ever more established. Teachers and learning support assistants are now skilled at teaching reading. The useful training and support they receive means adults have a secure subject knowledge. Pupils who find reading tricky are given effective help. They read books that match exactly what they learn in class. They practise new sounds regularly and love seeing themselves get better at reading. Some older pupils still do not read well enough. This is because they were not taught well when they were younger. They do, however, receive the right help to support them to catch up.

The new SENCo has reviewed the provision for many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff training is helping teachers to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to support pupils effectively. Pupils in receipt of an education, health and care plan are now receiving the right support. However, for pupils with less complex needs, leaders have not ensured that staff know precisely what pupils' needs are, what support they need or how staff will be able to measure whether they have achieved them.

The culture of the school is now one which fosters positive behaviour. Your work establishing a clear set of behaviour guidelines is paying dividends. These are understood by pupils, staff and parents. As a result, most pupils behave very well. They respond well to reminders. The behaviour of some pupils remains a concern for some staff and parents. Leaders continue to find ways to support pupils who struggle to manage their emotions and actions.

The members of the trust improvement board remain key to the continued improvement of the school. They continue to take a strategic view of the work of the school, providing support and challenge to school leaders in appropriate measure. They are realistic about where the school is on the improvement journey. The members of the board keep a close

check on the school's improvement plans, which are precise, to make sure improvements continue.

The weaknesses in safeguarding identified in the previous graded inspection in July 2022 have been eradicated. Leaders have strengthened the current systems and processes. Concerns raised by adults are reported swiftly and accurately. Pupils are safe in school and are taught how to stay safe. The designated safeguarding leads have now set to work remedying some of the deep-rooted weaknesses from the past. This effective work has led to some pupils receiving help and support they did not previously receive.

Staff value the support provided by the trust, along with the advice and guidance they receive from outside agencies. Much of this has recently been to help improve how staff teach reading. This is working well.

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