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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 7 and 8 June 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 May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the multi-academy trust, and members of the 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, visited lessons, met with pupils and staff, reviewed a range of pupils' work and 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 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 March 2023, you continue to lead the school with a determination that all pupils will receive the quality of education they deserve. In a relatively short space of time, you and your team of committed staff have remained focused on bringing about further improvement. You have succeeded in doing this.

The ongoing work to develop the curriculum is paying dividends. Leaders have added greater precision to the curriculum design. In many subjects, there is now more clarity for teachers about the important knowledge that pupils in their class need to know and remember. In subjects such as design and technology, physical education (PE), and history, the curriculum is carefully mapped out. Important concepts, such as chronology and monarchy in history and passing and receiving a ball in PE, are threaded through the curriculum. This helps pupils to connect what they know to what they are learning. Younger pupils now learn and remember much of what they are taught. However, due to weaknesses in the past, some older pupils still have significant gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive ever more useful support in class to help them with reading, writing and mathematics. This is because leaders have ensured that adults know the small steps that pupils must achieve to help them to succeed. Those pupils who find handwriting difficult, for example, now have time and help to master a small number of letters and joins before they move on to others. This was not always the case in the past. Despite this improvement, some pupils with SEND do not always learn well in other subjects. At times, they do not know what they must do to be successful and do not have activities adapted carefully enough for them to learn well. Leaders are supporting teachers to strengthen their subject knowledge. This is so that adaptations can be made to help pupils with SEND learn more. This remains a work in progress, and it will take more time to get right.

The school's phonics programme is now established. The youngest children learn to read with confidence and accuracy. This is because adults are well trained and teach the phonics programme with fidelity. Very few younger pupils need extra help with reading. Older pupils who still find reading tricky receive additional support from well-trained teaching assistants. This support is helping them to make up the ground they have lost in the past. Children in the early years continue to flourish. Adults know children as individuals. These children are cared for, learn well and are thriving in their first year in school.

Most pupils continue to behave well. Those who need additional support with their behaviour or with managing their emotions receive it. The system for recording behaviour incidents is now established. This ensures that leaders have a clear oversight, and adults are now managing pupils' behaviour more effectively. This is because they are more consistent in stepping in before issues arise. Consequently, the school is a calm and safe place for pupils to learn.

Leaders' plans for improvement build on the firm foundations that have been laid so far. Currently, these significant improvements have been secured by a small number of highly skilled individuals. Although improving, leadership capacity is underdeveloped. The trust has clear plans to ensure that the stability in leadership is maintained over time. This will help to ensure that the improvements seen so far are sustained, built upon and the school continues to improve. Currently, although sensible and appropriate, these plans need time to be implemented. They have not yet played out in practice.

The trust's improvement group continue to play a key role. Trustees keep a keen eye on how well the school is doing, making sure that leaders and staff do not take their foot off the pedal. Leaders' improvement planning is precise and focuses on small steps, so staff are not overwhelmed. Their workload is manageable. Staff feel valued and take great pride in working with you to continue to improve the education pupils receive. They are committed to the cause because of the supportive culture you have created.

Leaders and teachers continue to value the support provided, both through the trust and from external agencies. This support is always well tailored to focus on the specific aspect of school improvement that is being worked on.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies 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