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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leonard

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of The Cowbit St Mary's (Endowed) CofE Primary

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 19 October 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 took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and leaders for the trust that is currently supporting the school, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, other staff and the school's local authority improvement officer 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 visited lessons, looked at samples of pupils' work, spoke to pupils and scrutinised documents relating to the school's curriculum and the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

Main findings

The previous headteacher left the school in April 2023. You took up the post of headteacher from this date, supported by a local multi-academy trust. You have appointed one new class teacher and a teaching assistant. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body took up their positions in September 2023, having previously served on the body for some time.

Since joining the school, you have wasted no time in directing a new vision for the school's future success. All leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and improvement priorities. You have recognised the necessary urgency to improve the quality of education provided for all pupils so that they can achieve as well as they can.

The school's improvement plan is well informed. You have taken on board advice from external sources of expertise. You are navigating the school through a period of turbulence in staffing, with consideration for staff workload and well-being. The school is becoming more settled. Staff morale is positive. Staff are supportive of the changes that leaders are making. They further value the clarity of the school's raised expectations and opportunities for their professional learning. One member of staff captured the thoughts of many when they said, 'I have got my sense of excitement back, which I was beginning to lose.' All leaders, including governors, and staff share a sense of rejuvenation and optimism for the future. The school's investment in upgrading outdoor play areas and indoor learning spaces further reflects the school's renewed ambition.

The school's curriculum is gradually being transformed. Leaders are beginning to ensure that the curriculum starts in the early years and builds step by step towards the end of Year 6. In subjects such as geography, history and science, leaders are identifying and revising the precise knowledge and vocabulary that pupils need to know and remember. They are also raising expectations of what pupils can achieve in the school's mixed-age classes. Leaders recognise that the development of the curriculum requires more time. It is too soon to see the full impact of these changes.

Pupils told me that they like the changes that are being made. They say that lessons are more organised than they were previously. The curriculum changes are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly in Reception and Year 1. However, the quality of pupils' written work in key stage 2 remains too variable. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not yet as consistently high as they need to be. Sometimes, staff do not precisely follow the sequence of the school's new curriculum planning. The quality of pupils' work in mathematics is stronger in this key stage. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen the school's arrangements for monitoring the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning.

Early reading has been prioritised to ensure that pupils improve their accuracy and fluency in reading. Staff have received appropriate training to implement the school's phonics programme. Children in Reception, and particularly pupils in Year 1, are rapidly improving their achievement in reading. Pupils at an early stage of beginning to read are receiving

the extra help they need. Furthermore, the school has invested in a broad range of new reading books that stimulate pupils' interests and that promote their understanding of life in modern Britain. Pupils enjoy story time and discussing their learning in these sessions.

Improvements in curriculum planning mean that staff are becoming better informed about how they can provide specific academic support for pupils with SEND. Supporting adults say that they appreciate the clarity of what the school's new curriculum intention requires of them. Leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure that the school's oversight of pupils with SEND is consistently strong in all year groups.

At the heart of the school's improvement journey is the drive to make sure that all families understand the school's raised expectations, irrespective of their backgrounds. Leaders have nurtured effective communication between school and home that reflects understanding and empathy but without compromising the school's renewed expectations. Pupils' attendance at school, for example, is improving as a result. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is lower than previously. Pupils say that they feel happy and safe in school.

The school is redeveloping the curriculum for pupils' personal development, including in the early years. In Reception, children learn quickly how to understand concepts such as feelings and taking responsibility. Pupils have a strong moral understanding of treating others equally and with respect. However, pupils also say that they have not been taught about some important aspects of life in modern Britain, such as different family structures and relationships. The school's new programme will ensure that all required teaching for primary schools as outlined by the Department for Education is covered. Furthermore, the school is increasing the opportunities for all pupils to learn from wider school experiences such as trips, residential visits and by increasing the number of extra-curricular activities for pupils to join.

The school has benefited from the supporting trust, particularly in helping to develop the school's strategic approach to the necessary improvements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the director of education for the Diocese of Lincoln, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
His Majesty's Inspector