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Caroline Holcombe
St James Church of England Junior School
Upton Street
Gloucester
Gloucestershire
GL1 4JU

Dear Mrs Holcombe

Special measures monitoring inspection of St James Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and members of the school's senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. The school's single central record was seen.

Context

You started working at the school as the acting headteacher in April 2013. There have been several important changes to the school since the last inspection judged it to require special measures. These include changes to the senior leadership team and governing body. The governing body is in the process of reorganisation with an intended reduction in membership from 15 to nine.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Upon your appointment as acting headteacher, you quickly spotted that urgent improvements needed to be made. You and your senior leaders are working well together to tackle the most important weaknesses. You have established clear expectations, along with inaugurating higher aspirations, and are beginning to hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement. The roles and responsibilities of senior and subject leaders have been clarified. They are demonstrating their willingness to be fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of their areas of responsibility, along with being held to account for them. The school can show that improvements have already been made, particularly in terms of the learning environment and non-negotiable aspects of teaching and learning. Subject leaders' records show that pupils are being more accurately assessed, for example through greater consistency in marking with more personalised targets subsequently set.

The school has plans to initiate a nurture group following training starting in January 2014. The school should seek earlier training and faster instigation of this action to ensure those pupils most vulnerable due to their circumstances are more speedily supported to reach their potential.

The review of governance, which was a key recommendation of the previous inspection, is being undertaken. While they are at the early stage in driving school improvement, members have already been involved in subject visits with subject leaders to better understand the school.

The local authority's statement of action is appropriate. It shows that the local authority is working closely with the school by organising arrangements with a neighbouring school to strengthen the leadership and management. The support work of consultants, some of whom you proactively organised, are effectively targeted to respond to the particular needs of the school.

The draft raising achievement plan has challenging targets that are linked well with the local authority's statement of action. Actions have been taken on time and show what has been done to improve teaching. You are very clear about what needs to be done and how; having already started the journey to improvement. However, despite many strong elements within the draft plan, the following improvements are required in order to provide a clear direction out of special measures for all those who will need to use it.

- Succinctly demonstrate how well the individual success criteria have been met to enable others to check that the subsequent actions taken are timely and the most appropriate.
- Link the management of teachers' performance more closely to the progress made by the pupils they teach.

- Clearly identify the individuals responsible for ensuring effective actions have been taken, particularly governors.
- Provide references, and make clear the links between the whole-school plan and subject leaders' plans.
- Provide direct references to other school records, such as the more detailed monitoring accounts.

Following the monitoring inspection these judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and the Diocese of Gloucester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector