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Nicola Jones
Headteacher
Mepal and Witcham CofE VC Primary School
Brangehill Lane
Mepal
Ely
CB6 2AL

Dear Mrs Jones

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Mepal and Witcham CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Ely.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve teaching so that more is consistently good by making sure that:
 - work is always accurately matched to pupils' different ages and abilities
 - teachers develop pupils' independent learning skills so that they do not rely too heavily on adults to tell them what to do
 - the pace of lessons maintains the interest of all pupils
 - pupils are given opportunities to develop their literacy skills by writing at length in different subjects.

- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that:
 - all leaders are given the opportunity to develop skills to analyse data so that they can drive improvement in their subjects
 - governors are more active in the way they check on the school's performance so that they do not rely too heavily on the headteacher to guide them.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 May 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, subject leaders for numeracy and mathematics, two groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Ely. The inspector had a telephone conversation with another representative from the Diocese of Ely. The inspector observed three lessons jointly with the headteacher.

Context

The teacher of the mixed class of Years 4, 5 and 6, who is also the literacy coordinator, is leaving shortly and has been replaced temporarily until the end of term. The school is seeking to make a permanent appointment for the following term. The school will become an academy on 1 September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The improvements seen at the last monitoring inspection have been maintained and enhanced in some areas. The headteacher and staff are determined to demonstrate that the school is moving forward well. In this they continue to be supported effectively by local authority advisers, particularly for mathematics and literacy. The better analysis and interpretation of data by teachers noted last time has been further established in all year groups. The governing body has deepened its own understanding of assessment information and sharpened its challenge to the school on areas of continued disappointing attainment. The Chair of the Governing Body has a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is convinced that the impending review of governance will strengthen the more unified and coordinated approach to school improvement which is already, though slowly, developing. The quality of teaching is improving and the joint observations of lessons made during this second monitoring inspection confirmed that the school has an accurate picture of the quality of teaching in the school. As a consequence, the progress that most groups of pupils make is more rapid, though attainment remains below expectations for some pupils in the mixed Year 4, 5 and 6 class. The progress of those pupils with special educational needs is good. The school has benefited greatly from external support, and this has begun to enable the school to develop self-sustaining approaches of its own; a process which is not yet rapid enough due to changes in staffing.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching and learning have been more closely monitored by senior leaders, the local authority and relevant members of the governing body. This has ensured that weaker aspects of teaching are being eradicated.

- Pupils are given many more opportunities to develop their writing skills in different subjects, and teachers are better at encouraging writing that balances imaginative and factual styles. Pupils said they found the 'VCOPs' method of focusing on the development of better use of vocabulary and other aspects of the mechanics of writing, very useful.
- Teachers' marking is good and some is exemplary. Pupils said that they valued the comments that teachers make in their books and found it very useful to be able to respond to these comments and actually make the improvements required.
- Teacher's monitoring of books and other work has been sharpened and led to a clearer understanding of what has worked in lessons and what needs to be further improved.
- The 'luggage label' approach of using targets for individual pupils, which move from one piece of work to the next and so are always visible to pupils, has enabled pupils to keep a better check on their progress towards meeting, and sometimes exceeding, their targets.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Although work is more accurately matched to pupils' learning needs, this is not consistently the case for the most-able pupils. Sometimes, the work set is completed very quickly by this group of pupils and appropriately challenging extension work is not always provided quickly enough.
- The 'luggage label' approach to the use of targets is not consistently used in all classes.
- Where attainment dips, as in Year 4, there is not yet effective enough support for developing pupils' attainment at a faster rate, which means that the better progress made by pupils in Years 5 and 6 is still, largely, progress to make up lost ground.
- Although more opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their writing skills, a number of writing tasks are set on topics of which pupils have no, or very little, personal experience, and hence their ideas and associated writing are more limited.

External support

The school values highly the external support it has received from various sources, but especially that from local authority advisers and trainers. The impact of this has been most obvious in improvements made in the teaching of mathematics and literacy, but also for the Early Years Foundation Stage and support for the governing body. The two local authority advisory governors have supported the governing body well.