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Ms Laura Sproston
Headteacher
Caston Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
The Street
Caston
Attleborough
NR17 1DD

Dear Mrs Sproston

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Caston Church of England
Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 27–28 January 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Pete Sewell
Associate Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise achievement by:
 - consistently implementing the school's policy for behaviour, and insisting on high standards of conduct at all times from all pupils
 - making sure each new development is fully understood by staff and pupils so that it is implemented effectively
 - teaching challenging lessons that enable pupils to move forward more rapidly in their learning
 - ensuring additional pupil premium funding is used effectively so that these pupils make quicker progress and close the achievement gap between themselves and other pupils
 - adopting methods that ensure pupils concentrate, work hard and learn well
 - closing gaps in pupils' numeracy skills
 - implementing a handwriting policy that is consistently followed to raise standards
 - ensuring teaching assistants have the knowledge and skills to effectively undertake the tasks they are given and so make a stronger contribution to pupils' learning.

- Pupils' need to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning by showing resilience and perseverance when faced with unfamiliar or difficult work taking pride in the presentation of their work.

- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that:
 - areas for improvement from the previous inspection are quickly and fully implemented, particularly that governors closely monitor and sufficiently challenge the work of the school
 - the recommendations of the review of governance are fully implemented and governors adhere to time frames for actions
 - a leadership and management structure is created, for both school and subject leadership, that is fit for purpose and enables and supports rapid school improvement
 - information about the progress of pupils and work of the school is accurate so that analysis can properly support pupil progress and improvement.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27–28 January 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of the diocese.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school is in the process of consultation towards federation with Parker's Church of England Primary School. A headteacher oversees leadership of both schools. She took up this appointment from 1 January 2015. The school appointed two new teachers and two teaching assistants in September 2014. The school is supported by a National Leader of Education.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Overall, the attainment of pupils who took the national tests in 2014 showed that standards had improved since 2013 but standards are still well below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check in phonics (the sounds that letters make) was well below the national average. This represented a drop in standards from 2013. In Key Stage 1, standards in writing and mathematics were also below national averages, but reading was in line with national figures. Standards at Key Stage 2 were also below national averages, with pupils about five terms behind pupils nationally in mathematics and four terms behind in reading and writing. However, the small number of pupils in each year group means that achievement information must be used with caution.

Evidence from pupils' work in lessons over time demonstrates that pupils are currently making variable progress in mathematics and writing. Some disadvantaged pupils are starting to make better progress than in the past but the school cannot yet demonstrate if gaps are closing between these pupils and their peers. The school has a strategy in place for teaching phonics but this has yet to impact fully on pupils' ability to sound out unfamiliar words.

Pupils have personal targets which teachers record on the front of their books. Pupils understand what these targets mean and why they are important. These targets indicate that teachers have aspirational expectations, but also that teachers' assessments vary in accuracy and that, frequently, teachers are overly generous in their assessment and marking. The Early Years Foundation Stage baseline assessments have been revised and the school now has a more accurate picture of what the children can do when they start at the school. The in-school tracking information which teachers use to assess progress is not accurate. The school is

actively working on the accuracy of assessment, through moderation, by working with external partners.

The quality of teaching

The impact of teaching on pupils' progress over time is uneven. Teachers now have much higher expectations of the pupils and are more consistent in their approach to planning. However, the most able are sometimes given work which is too easy or which does not make them think deeply enough about their work. As a result, their progress slows. The resources used to support learning still vary in quality and usefulness. All teachers explain the purpose of the lesson at the start, so that the pupils know what they are learning and how to make progress. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 said that they feel more confident about their learning. Some have recognised that they are now being challenged more than before, and like the fact that more is expected of them in lessons.

Teachers now plan lessons that are more consistent in tackling previous low achievement in phonics. In particular, leaders have organised a programme across the whole school so that pupils now receive phonics teaching appropriate to their levels of achievement. However, it is too early to see the impact of this on pupils' progress. The school is currently developing a whole-school handwriting policy but this has not yet been implemented.

Teachers are finding that there are gaps in pupils' learning, particularly in mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 2. The school has not yet put in place an effective structure of targeted support so that children can reach age-related expectations with greater urgency.

On occasions, teachers spend too long introducing the task and pupils are slow to get started. However, the start of the day is prompt and business-like in all classes. Teachers give pupils effective start-of-the-day (SODA) tasks so that the pupils settle quickly into the routine of the day. This is particularly effective in the Reception, Year 1 and 2 classes. Pupils in Key Stage 2 now use their SODA time to work on misconceptions from the previous day's learning. This was seen during the inspection in May 2014 but it is now more sharply focused on accelerating pupils' progress.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage respond well to stimulating and practical tasks which develop their use of language and ideas. However, this does not yet happen frequently enough.

Teaching assistants have benefited from some extra training. They now work more closely with teachers and they plan activities together. These activities stimulate and interest pupils more and, as a consequence, the pupils behave better and are more eager to learn. However, the impact of teaching assistants observed during lessons

was varied. Insufficient use is made of their skills to provide interventions and drive achievement faster.

A greater focus on marking and feedback is evident from the work in pupils' books. Teachers are now giving more targeted advice on how pupils can improve their work and accelerate their learning. However, often, teachers make too many descriptive comments about the work and do not identify what the pupil needs to do next to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most pupils are well behaved and the new systems the school has put into place to manage behaviour are being used successfully by all teachers across the school. This means that pupils are more ready to learn, and incidents of disruption are rare and well managed. Pupils' behaviour around school is generally good. They are polite and well mannered, and are eager to show visitors the work they are doing. They have a pride in their work which was not evident before. Attitudes to learning have improved and, as a result, pupils have the opportunity to make better progress. Pupils have not yet developed the attitudes to learning that will enable them to take more responsibility for their own learning and therefore make more rapid progress.

The school's work to keep the pupils safe is effective. Pupils talk confidently about the help they get to keep themselves safe.

Attendance rates have steadily improved and pupils now enjoy coming to school because they find it a more stimulating and challenging environment. Discussions with pupils indicate that they are positive about their learning and they recognise that teachers' expectations of their work and behaviour are more consistent. They are beginning to enjoy the greater challenge in lessons, but there is more work to be done to develop their resilience further.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Governors and external partners have acted decisively to secure the future of the school, and the current plans to federate are well underway. This has been well received by staff, parents and pupils. The school is in the process of federating with Parker's Church of England Primary School. This process began on 1 January 2015. It is intended that a newly formed federated governing body will be in place on 1 May 2015.

After the last inspection report, school leaders quickly focused on the areas for improvement and communicated their priorities well to staff and parents.

The school development plan and the local authority statement of action have been updated in the light of the schools' recent federation with Parker's Church of England

Primary School. These plans are now fit for purpose. The recommendations from an earlier review of the effectiveness of the governing body have not yet been addressed in the light of these changes. School leaders and governors now understand the importance of their role in driving up standards and they are fully galvanised to this end.

A review of pupil premium spending took place in October 2014 and the recommendations are in line with the areas for improvement from the last inspection report. The impact of the pupil premium spending has not been assessed accurately yet. This is because school assessment information is not accurate and therefore it is difficult to show the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

A National Leader of Education is working closely with teachers in Key Stage 1 to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate for the needs of the children to help secure accelerated progress.

The new headteacher from Parker's Church of England Primary School has quickly established confidence among the staff and has raised expectations. Staff speak highly of her leadership and the collaborative working they experience through meeting and sharing with the staff from Parker's Church of England Primary School.

External support

Leaders and teachers have benefited from considerable support from the diocese, local authority and a National Leader of Education. The National Leader of Education has been particularly effective in raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do. She has provided challenge to teachers as well as giving curriculum advice. The Diocese of Norwich, the local authority and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board have ensured urgency over the pace of improvement, and moves to secure the future of the school are well underway. The staff from both schools in the newly created federation have already met together several times. Staff are feeling positive about this collaboration and some joint moderation has already taken place. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.

Priorities for further improvement

- A federated governing body should be established to fully secure the future of the school so that there is no uncertainty about who holds the school to account.