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Ms Sarah Durrant
Marshland St James VC Primary School and Nursery
School Road
Marshland St James
Wisbech
PE14 8EY

Dear Ms Durrant

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Marshland St James VC Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 15 April 2015 with Wendy Varney HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, representatives from the governing body, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Ely. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

You took me on a tour of the school, visiting all classrooms, to talk to pupils and observe their work.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher with leadership responsibility has returned from maternity leave. Year 6 pupils are taught as a separate class for this term. There is a programme underway to restructure the support staff. Plans are in place for the school to become a sponsored academy in September 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have worked hard and identified reasonable priorities of what needs to be achieved to improve the school. You are creating a senior team who share your determination to succeed. An experienced Improvement Board, together with the governing body, are in place to provide effective support and challenge to you. The local authority and the Diocese of Ely are providing strong support and this is something that you value.

The school has two plans in place, a school improvement plan and a local authority statement of action. You have broadly addressed the issues raised in the previous inspection, setting timescales that cover this summer term. The plans are not yet explicitly linked to raising the outcomes for specific groups of pupils.

In your school plan you have identified how you will measure the success of your actions. However, the success criteria are often too vague or unrealistic. Although you have clearly identified appropriate monitoring activities, they are not detailed enough to allow governors the opportunity to hold the school leadership to account.

You have taken decisive action over the splitting of the older classes to strengthen teaching in Year 6 this term. However, there is still an insufficient sense of urgency in tackling some of the whole-school priorities for improvement.

The governing body is committed to improve its effectiveness. Following the external review of governance carried out by the local authority, governors are now asking appropriate questions to hold you more to account for the improvements in the school. The review suggests a long list of recommendations and governors now need to devise a plan of action to enable them to fulfil these effectively.

As a school you are committed to keeping parents informed about the progress of the school, but this has not yet happened. A greater sense of urgency is required to communicate with parents so that they understand the priorities and the progress the school is making.

Some of the actions taken since the last inspection have not yet had time to show impact. The school has a system of tracking the progress of pupils in their learning, but this still requires work for it to be effective. A range of professional development opportunities has been planned and provided for staff, including in-house and local authority support for individuals. However, planned visits to other schools have not yet taken place.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding has not yet taken place and needs to happen as a matter of urgency.

The local authority's statement of action sets out a suitable range of support for the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

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

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

This letter has been / will be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where the school is an academy)
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools