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8 June 2015

Mrs Claire Matthews
Interim Headteacher
St Mary's CofE VA Primary School
Wintringham Road
St Neots
PE19 1NX

Dear Mrs Matthews

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 June 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 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 March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and other school leaders and teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan. I made brief visits to a number of lessons, and looked at a random selection of pupils' written work.

Context

Since the recent section 5 inspection, the previous headteacher has left the school and you have been appointed on an interim basis. The school's preparations for academy conversion under the sponsorship of the Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust are well established. The school plans to become an academy on 1 September 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You are pursuing the school improvement plan's most urgent priorities appropriately and with determination. By challenging poor teaching you have established ambitious targets for improvement, to which most staff are responding. You are also ensuring that teachers are receiving appropriate support. Changes to the way in which pupils' absence is followed up have had a marked impact in a short space of time on the attendance rates of persistent absentees. Teachers are applying a revised and simplified pupil behaviour policy consistently. Pupils appreciate the new rewards for behaving well. Many parents attend the new 'celebration assemblies' you have introduced, and they appreciate being able to discuss any concerns with you. Changes to the written feedback given to pupils about their work are making it clear what they need to do next. You are ensuring that they are given the time to make the changes. Internal and external checks are helping to establish the accuracy of the marks or levels that teachers apply to pupils' work.

The literacy coordinator is leading aspects of the improvement plan effectively and checking standards carefully. Following a review, guided reading sessions provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils. The introduction of a new handwriting policy is beginning to have an impact on pupils' standards of presentation. Additional extended writing tasks are being introduced to all units of work so that pupils are able to write at length in different genres and across subjects.

Not all leaders are making a strong contribution to pursuing the school's improvement plan's objectives, or checking carefully the impact of ongoing work. There has been insufficient urgency in monitoring the quality of feedback that pupils receive in mathematics. This means that the senior leader responsible is unable to make a judgement about the impact of the recent changes. Not enough has been done to determine the impact on pupils' progress of mentoring and additional support.

The governing body is helping to bring about improvement. Governors are visiting regularly to monitor progress towards achieving the targets in the school's improvement plans. The purpose of these visits is clear; governors ask searching questions and follow up any issues with the headteacher. Governors have made changes to the way they work following a recent review. As a result, their meetings are sharply focused on issues relating to pupils' progress and other aspects of the improvement plan. They have arranged for a review of how the school uses pupil premium funding. Governors are working alongside the Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust on preparations for the school's conversion to academy status. This is allowing you to concentrate on how well pupils are learning.

The local authority has devised an appropriate statement of action to bring about the improvements needed for the school's removal from special measures. This has been written in collaboration with the sponsoring academy trust, so that there is

continuity upon the school's anticipated conversion. Advisers are supporting staff in improving pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement plan is 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, and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority
cc. The Secretary of State
cc. Diocese