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19 June 2015

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

Dear Ms Durrant

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

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 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 January 2015. 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 Norfolk local authority and Diocese of Ely.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of appropriate authority for Marshland St James VC Primary School and Nursery

cc. Julia Idiens Director of Children's Services for Norfolk local authority

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 15-16 January 2015

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently at least good and encourages pupils to develop more positive attitudes to learning by:
 - all teachers having high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - setting consistently challenging work for all groups of pupils, and particularly for the most-able pupils
 - planning activities in lessons to engage pupils and motivate them to learn
 - encouraging pupils to be actively involved, enquiring and ambitious in their learning
 - providing better support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, which enables them to make at least good progress.

- Raise pupils' achievement, particularly in Years 1 and 2, by ensuring that:
 - the progress of disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is closely monitored and that effective additional support is provided
 - the most-able pupils make more consistently rapid progress.

- Improve the impact of leaders and governors by ensuring that:
 - the effectiveness and impact of subject leaders is at least good
 - the curriculum meets the learning needs of the full range of pupils
 - the work of learning support staff is closely monitored, and guidance is provided so that the effectiveness of this support, in accelerating pupils' progress, can be measured
 - the evaluation of the impact of the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is more effective.

An external review of the school's use of the 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 18 June 2015

Evidence

The monitoring inspection focused on progress made with the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection.

The inspector met with the headteacher, subject leaders, representatives from the governing body, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese of Ely. The inspector and headteacher observed teaching in every class and scrutinised pupils' work in books. Pupils were spoken to informally about their learning. The compliance of the safety records in the school was checked and confirmed.

Context

Since the last inspection, one member of staff remains on long-term absence. One teacher has resigned. Leaders have plans in place to become an academy on 1 September 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the previous visit, the headteacher has developed the school plan so that it now references the points from the inspection. Although reasonable progress is being made in raising the outcomes of pupils this year, this has been with a large amount of external support from the local authority and the diocese of Ely. As a result, the impact on the other areas for improvement has been much slower.

The governing body has written their own action plan following the external review. The governors' plan and the school's plan are not clearly linked, so it is difficult for governors to hold the school to account by asking focused and challenging questions. Governors recognise that they have been slow to respond to the areas for improvement because they have been hampered by a lack of skills. The support of external governors, provided by the local authority, is new and provides appropriate training.

The current indications are that leaders have raised pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, and predictions for end of key stage assessments show an improvement on last year. Leaders have rightly focused efforts on raising the achievement of the pupils and the local authority has externally verified the school's assessments. There is now more rigorous tracking of individual achievement across the school.

The behaviour of pupils has improved. Teachers are focusing on helping them acquire positive learning behaviours and the pupils are responding well. They are developing improved attitudes to learning and, as a result, are more willing to

persevere with their activities and participate in lessons. They are polite and move calmly around the school.

There has been some progress in the leading of teaching. From the evidence seen in lessons, pupils are experiencing a wider range of activities. They are more enthusiastic about their learning as a result. The most-able pupils still require interesting and thought-provoking work. In mathematics, the most able are not appropriately challenged to think and apply their mathematical understanding in a way that helps them make enough progress. So, they wait for an adult, produce little work or decide their own course of action to demonstrate their capabilities. Adults do not recognise or give praise for this action. Feedback is minimal and does not follow the school policy to give a further challenge.

The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 shows signs of improvement. This is not as evident in Key Stage 1 and the early years. Decisions have still to be made about the curriculum and how this will creatively provide for the needs and interests of the pupils, so they can become involved and ambitious in their learning. Middle leaders have plans for how they will create a curriculum plan for the school but this has not resulted in action so far this year.

Teaching in the early years is not developing an improved enthusiasm and positive attitude for learning for the children in these small classes. The environment lacks vibrancy and creative approaches for children to develop their core skills. They are well behaved and make good choices with the activities on offer. Children try hard when tackling writing activities but adults still expect too little of them. This is having little impact on accelerating their learning and progress.

Middle leaders are not fully involved in monitoring and evaluating their subject areas over this term, so their impact has been limited. However, they appreciate the links with subject leaders at other local schools. This is helping them gain the necessary skills to lead and ensure their subjects are taught in more interesting and creative ways.

The headteacher has successfully restructured the deployment of the learning support assistants and they are now used more effectively. They have received training and this has helped to develop their skills. Support assistants still do not have performance management targets, so their effectiveness in raising pupil progress cannot be measured by the leadership. In class, they demonstrate effective questioning skills and work well with individuals or small groups.

The pupil premium review has still not been carried out; this is an urgent action that requires attention.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The support school leadership and governance have received through the local authority and the diocese of Ely has been good.
- Leaders use data and information to track pupils' progress ensures that interventions take place when a pupil falls behind.
- Changes to the teaching of phonics have resulted in more pupils on track to pass their Year 1 phonics screening check.
- Dividing Year 5 and 6 into very small, separate classes has meant that they receive enhanced teacher support. Their progress has accelerated as a result.
- Behaviour throughout the school has improved. Pupils are attentive in lessons and they move around the school in a calm and orderly way. They are polite and friendly to adults.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school and governors' plans for improvement are not effectively aligned. As a consequence, school improvement is not cohesive and results in too many actions that are not precise enough to secure rapid school improvements.
- Subject leaders are not given time to monitor and evaluate teaching, and so some inadequate practices still remain. The marking in mathematics at Key Stage 1 does not help pupils make progress. It does not give precise help to pupils as to how they can improve their work.
- In Key Stage 1, opportunities for assessment of pupils' learning in mathematics are not being used as effectively as Key Stage 2 to accurately provide activities that help the most-able make enough progress.
- In the early years, not enough is expected of pupils so opportunities for them to develop their enthusiasm in learning are too few.

External support

The local authority has provided a good level of support, which the school values. They visit regularly to monitor leaders' impact and have assisted in improving pupils' achievement. The local authority is working closely with the diocese of Ely to provide a smooth transition as the school converts to become an academy in September.