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Mrs Fiona Cullerne
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cullerne

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Matthias Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 June 2019, 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 that 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 that took place in June 2018.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Diocese of Worcester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2018

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - appropriate external support is secured to assist current leaders
 - improvement planning is sharper and sets clear priorities for improvement which leaders and governors check and evaluate
 - all leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are held to account by senior leaders and governors
 - newly appointed leaders develop and embed their skills so that they can monitor provision in their areas of responsibility and bring about improvements
 - leaders make clear to staff what they need to do to improve outcomes across the school
 - governors, using national and local comparative data, challenge leaders effectively about the standards pupils achieve and the progress they make over time.
- Urgently improve pupils' achievement so that all groups of pupils, including the most able, those with SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, make the progress needed to reach age-related expectations and close the gap with other pupils nationally.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by making sure that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve, especially in reading, writing and mathematics
 - teachers sharpen their use of assessment information and knowledge of what pupils can do in order to maximise progress from their starting points
 - leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching accurately and use this information to provide appropriate training and support for teachers
 - teachers plan work so that pupils can apply their writing skills across the curriculum and write with the accuracy and depth expected for their age
 - pupils who have gaps in their mathematical knowledge and skills are helped to catch up
 - teachers thoroughly check pupils' understanding of what they have read so that pupils acquire and deepen their comprehension skills
 - teachers provide pupils with the accurate information they need to improve their learning

- all teachers insist on high standards of presentation in pupils' work and tackle errors and misconceptions at the earliest opportunity.

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.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 to 12 June 2019

Evidence

During this monitoring inspection, I observed learning in classes from Year 1 to Year 6, all jointly with the headteacher. I also looked at pupils' writing and their work in mathematics books. I met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leader of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and some class teachers. I also spoke to representatives from the Diocese of Worcester and to a consultant who has provided external support to the school.

I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I met with a group of six pupils from Years 5 and 6. I also met with three governors. I scrutinised school documents, including the school's own information about pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation document and reports produced by education consultants who have provided support to the school. The single central record was checked.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes to teaching and support staff throughout the school. In total, 12 members of staff have left the school and seven have been appointed. There are, currently, two long-term supply teachers working at the school. In addition, there have been substantial changes to the governing body, including a new chair who was appointed during the term after the recent section 5 inspection. Three further governors have recently been appointed. There are currently five vacancies on the governing body.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the previous inspection, there was a delay in leaders' action to address the weaknesses identified in the report. Leaders did not act with urgency to secure appropriate support and, as a result, efforts to implement and share a robust action plan were impeded. In addition, the much-needed review of governance did not take place until January 2019. While there is increasing evidence that leaders are responding to the support they have commissioned, weaknesses persist in leadership, teaching and pupils' outcomes.

The school improvement plan reflects the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. It sets out leaders' expectations for what will be achieved in each area. However, the plan includes many generalised statements and does not set out clearly enough the success criteria for each aspect of improvement. The plan would benefit from the inclusion of quantifiable targets by which leaders can measure the impact of their actions. Although leaders understand the aspects of leadership and teaching that must be improved, they are not precise enough about the action that needs to be taken.

Since the inspection, governors have not held leaders to account well enough. Until recently, governors did not have a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement or the impact of additional funding used to support pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. During the academic year, governors have made some very astute appointments and they are now in a stronger position to provide appropriate challenge and support. However, this work is in the early stages and it is not possible to note any discernible impact.

Leaders, including those who are more recently appointed, understand their roles and responsibilities. In addition, there are now more opportunities for senior leaders to hold members of the wider leadership team to account, for example through regular meetings and reviews of pupils' progress in specific subjects and key stages. However, there is a lack of clarity around what members of the wider leadership team could do to ensure that the headteacher has the necessary time to be able to focus on essential, strategic, whole-school improvement. Too often, the headteacher is drawn into the day-to-day management of the school and this prevents her from being able to focus on overseeing improvements as well as she could.

The SEND coordinator (SENCo) and the deputy headteacher have benefited from the support provided by a national leader of education (NLE). This has enabled them to shape improvements in aspects of their roles. For example, the SENCo has sharpened the process for identifying pupils with additional needs. She has provided appropriate training for teachers and support staff and has raised teachers' expectations of what pupils with SEND can achieve. The deputy headteacher has responsibility for the impact of the pupil premium grant, the additional funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils. She has acted upon the recommendations from the pupil premium review which was carried out five months after the inspection. For example, leaders have recently introduced a system that ensures they are able to make termly checks on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make. This means that leaders are beginning to have a better understanding of the value of the additional interventions that are put into place to support this group of pupils.

Senior leaders are now making more frequent checks on the quality of teaching and learning, for example through lesson observations and reviewing work in pupils' books. From the start of the summer term, senior leaders have provided teachers with much clearer guidance about what they are doing well and what needs further improvement. Teachers told the inspector that they find this very useful to help them improve their practice. Teachers also said that this year they had benefited from training to help them better meet the needs of all pupils in their class, specifically in mathematics and writing. Where weak teaching has been identified, leaders have put robust support plans in place to bring about improvement. However, due to a delay in this support being put into place, these plans have not had sufficient impact.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have introduced new approaches to how reading, writing and mathematics are taught in key stages 1 and 2. This ensures that teaching is pitched at what must be taught in each year group. In addition, leaders have introduced 'non-negotiables' linked to pupils' presentation and basic skills. However, leaders did not insist on all teachers consistently implementing these 'non-negotiables' until the summer term. As a result, there is still some inconsistency in teachers' expectations of what all pupils can do. In addition, some teachers are not applying the school's feedback policy consistently. This means that in some classes pupils do not understand well enough what they need to do to improve their learning.

Teachers provide focused support in mathematics lessons for pupils who need to catch up through the daily 'pre-teach' sessions. This enables identified pupils to access the tasks that are planned for the whole class. The school's information about current pupils shows that while there is an increase in the proportion of pupils who are working at the standard typical for their age, in some year groups these proportions remain low.

Pupils' books show that, since September, there has been an increase in the opportunities they have to produce extended pieces of writing. There are examples of purposeful, writing tasks linked to shared reading texts or to class topics, in all classes. Since the increased focus on improving pupils' basic skills during the summer term, there is less evidence of repeated errors linked to spelling and punctuation. A new reading leader was recently appointed, and she has increased the opportunities that pupils have to read high-quality texts and develop comprehension skills. Pupils' books and school assessment information show that pupils are now making better progress. However, rates of progress are inconsistent across the school.

Recently, leaders have revised the format of termly, pupil-progress meetings and they have raised their expectations of what teachers must do to meet the needs of all pupils in their class. All teachers are provided with pupils' prior assessment information and details of any additional needs. Pupils' books show that teachers are now making better use of this information to plan tasks that build on what most pupils already know and can do. However, teachers do not have sufficiently high enough expectations of what the most able pupils can do. This limits the progress that this group of pupils can make.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils behave well in lessons and as they move around the school. They are polite, well-mannered and welcoming to visitors. In visits to classes, pupils were keen to explain what they were learning about and to share work that they are proud of. There is evidence of well-presented work and a significant improvement in pupils' handwriting in many classes. However, sometimes, where expectations are too low,

pupils do not take enough pride in their work and presentation is not as good as it should be.

Pupils told the inspector that behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime is good because they get along with each other well and because there are plenty of activities to get involved with. Pupils are confident that if they have any problems an adult at school will listen and provide help. Relationships between pupils and adults, and pupils with each other are positive.

Pupils' absence continues to be in line with national averages. Leaders have clear systems in place to monitor absence and have high expectations that pupils will attend school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2018, pupils' progress was below the national average by the end of key stage 2 in reading and it was significantly below in writing. In addition, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 was below the national average. This means that a significant proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, were not academically prepared for the next stage in their education.

Disadvantaged pupils made less progress than other pupils in the school and significantly less progress than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Leaders have implemented a rigorous system for checking the current disadvantaged pupils' progress. The school's assessment information shows that there is a reduction in the difference between disadvantaged and other pupils' progress in most year groups. However, in the majority of year groups, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils working at the standard typical for their age is below the proportion of other pupils in the school and nationally who are.

The SENCo carefully tracks the progress of pupils who receive interventions. She ensures that all teachers know the individual targets that pupils have been given so that they can be reinforced during whole-class lessons. As a result, more than half of the pupils with SEND are making stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics than in the past. However, the school's assessment information shows that a high proportion of pupils with SEND are not making enough progress to reduce the differences between them and their peers.

Although there are inconsistencies in subjects and year groups, pupils' books and current information show that pupils are making better progress than in the past. However, this progress is not strong enough to ensure that, across the school, pupils are closing the gap with pupils nationally. For example, in Year 2 and Year 6 the proportion of pupils working at the standard typical for their age in reading, writing and mathematics remains low.

External support

The school has engaged with a range of external support. This has been provided through the Diocese of Worcester, an NLE from the Mercian Education Trust and support commissioned through the local authority. For example, the coaching provided through the NLE has developed the leadership skills of the SENCo and the deputy headteacher. Teachers have received training that has improved their subject knowledge of what pupils in each year group should be learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Each aspect of this support has been effective but much of it has only recently begun to have any impact on progress towards the removal of special measures.

Senior leaders are determined to build on the recent improvements. They are committed to improving outcomes for pupils. However, despite seeking support for strategic leadership, the school has been unable to secure this. This has significantly affected the pace of improvement. The diocese has rightly challenged leaders about the urgency of action since the school was placed in special measures. They have provided effective support, for example by being part of a review, during the spring term, of the progress made against the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. This has resulted in leaders increasing the rigour with which they are tackling weaknesses, but a delay with this approach has impeded the progress towards the removal of special measures.

Governors have received training on how to analyse the school's assessment information so that they are in a much stronger position to hold leaders to account. However, this was delivered very recently, and it has not had the necessary impact to improve the effectiveness of the governing body.