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Mrs Xanthe Glynne
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Glynne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southminster Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to work on the areas identified for improvement outlined in the previous inspection report
- improve the teaching of phonics so that all pupils can read confidently by the end of key stage 1
- build leadership capacity by supporting middle leaders to develop their roles within the subjects they lead
- ensure that pupils are receiving a quality curriculum that covers a range of subjects in line with or better than the criteria outlined in the national curriculum
- improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in reading, writing and mathematics by strengthening teachers' practice, so that more pupils are

achieving in line with national standards by the time they leave the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders of English and mathematics, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector also visited classes and spoke with pupils about their learning. The school action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection school staff, pupils and parents have experienced significant turbulence. There have been many changes within the leadership team. There have also been significant changes in teaching staff over the past two years.

An interim headteacher took up the post in February 2019 and you have recently taken up post as acting headteacher. Some year groups have had several teachers in the space of a year. Most teachers currently in the school were not working at the school at the time of the previous inspection. There has been a change in the leadership of the trust and the chair of the governing body. There has also been a change in teachers who hold leadership responsibilities, such as those who are responsible for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Main findings

Leaders, including the trust and the local governing body, have not challenged and supported school leaders well enough to ensure improvements since the previous inspection. The turnover in staff at all levels has also hindered the progress. You and trust leaders recognise the urgency to improve and have prioritised actions appropriately. You have immediately addressed the most important aspects of school improvement. For example, you have successfully managed to secure a stable workforce. You have also instilled confidence in the staff and restored staff morale. Safeguarding is effective and leaders follow up pupils' concerns swiftly.

The instability in leadership has meant that improvements in pupils' achievements have been too slow. Pupils have not been receiving a curriculum of the quality they are entitled to. This means that many are underachieving at each key stage. Therefore, they are not ready for the next stage of their education.

Leaders' overarching plans address the school's priorities. They outline the development and training needed for teachers to be able to deliver a curriculum that is broad and covers all subject areas. You have already introduced systems to improve safeguarding and improve pupils' behaviour. This has ensured consistency across the school in the way staff record pupils' concerns and in managing pupils' behaviour. You have also made the school swimming pool accessible and are

working more closely with the parent teacher association.

We agreed that standards of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics are too low across the school. You also acknowledge that there is a lot to do to ensure that pupils catch up quickly. You and your team have identified areas where pupils are not achieving well and have developed plans to address this. Work has already started, and focused learning in small groups is beginning for those pupils who most need it.

An area for development from the previous inspection was to improve subject leadership and this has started to happen. Leaders of English and mathematics are new to post but knowledgeable and determined. They have identified gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. They have outlined appropriate actions, to include staff training, and have started implementing changes and checking the impact of their work.

Raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. You are clear about what you want pupils to do by the time they leave the school. You have set some clear guidelines to help improve standards in pupils' writing. Teachers have introduced tasks that routinely challenge pupils in their mathematics learning. In some year groups there is evidence that this is helping pupils to become more confident in their work.

Leadership of the early years has not been good enough. Children in Year 1 are having to catch up significantly, particularly in phonics and writing. There are new teachers now in post.

Children in Reception have settled early in the term. They were using a range of quality resources with confidence and chatted happily with adults in the room. You are working closely with the pre-school so that you have a better understanding of the needs of the children when they enter Reception. There is much more work to do to ensure that children in Reception are ready for Year 1. You have a clear plan to improve the teaching of phonics. You already have the skills within the school among your staff. You are addressing weaknesses with focused support and this is already helping pupils to catch up. This is a priority for leaders.

It is clear to see that relationships with staff and parents are improving. Although many staff are new to the school, those in place during the previous inspection now feel valued and supported. All staff spoken with are overwhelmingly supportive of the new leadership. They reported that leaders have effectively communicated the many changes that need to happen. All staff commented that changes are purposeful and necessary. You have had meetings with parents to keep them informed about the changes, particularly about introducing mixed-age classes. Parents report that communication has improved. They are hopeful that leaders' actions will raise standards and bring about positive learning experiences for their children.

Despite the upheaval, pupils remain positive about the school and their teachers. They are particularly happy about the improvement in pupils' behaviour. Pupils say they are happy, safe and enjoy school. They know how to stay safe online and commented sensibly about the dangers when using the internet. They also spoke about their love of reading and could all name their favourite author. They are particularly enjoying one class book, 'Goodnight Mr Tom'. Pupils value the new ways in which teachers help them to improve their work. They say that it is clear to see what they have done well and what else they need to do to improve.

You are particularly mindful of staff well-being and staff workload during a time when there is much to do to improve the quality of education in the school. There is no doubt that you and the trust recognise the importance of urgency needed to raise standards.

External support

The school is receiving valuable support from the schools within the trust. Specialist leaders across the trust work alongside the more experienced teachers within the school. You are bringing together staff with expertise in subject specific and curriculum leadership to work with teachers. Teachers are receiving support so that they can help pupils achieve better in reading writing and mathematics. Your own experience and skills have ensured that systems were in place at the beginning of term and that staff were aware of the improvements needed from the onset. The trust will continue to provide support to you and your team for the foreseeable future.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector