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9 December 2010

Mrs H Williams
Headteacher
Orchards Church of England Primary School
Cherry Road
Wisbech
PE13 3NP

Dear Mrs Williams

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Orchards Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 December 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocesan Director of Education and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2009

- Raise standards in English and mathematics to at least the national average by:
 - increasing significantly the rates of progress pupils make
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to write across subjects and at length
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their numeracy skills in a range of different contexts.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - using assessment data more effectively to plan the next steps in pupils' learning
 - making lessons more stimulating, so that they capture and develop pupils' interests
 - improving teachers' skills in using questions to challenge pupils and help them develop their ideas
 - establishing stronger links between different areas of learning
 - using marking to show pupils how to improve their work.
- Increase attendance to at least the national average by:
 - taking more account of pupils' views in providing a curriculum that interests and engages them and makes them want to come to school
 - using the full range of legal and other processes to bring about very rapid improvement.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - monitoring the performance of groups of pupils and individuals more closely and accurately to ensure that they all achieve as well as they can
 - developing further a sense of common purpose amongst senior leaders so that all have clearly understood areas of responsibility and are held strongly to account.
 - working with the local authority to ensure that any impediments to good governance are quickly removed.

Special measures: monitoring of Orchards Church of England Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 December 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior staff, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and two governors.

Context

A deputy headteacher is seconded to another school. An experienced senior leader has joined the school with responsibility for assessment and tracking pupils' progress. The proportion of pupils new to the country and speaking English as an additional language has increased.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

In 2010, the provisional results in national tests for Year 6 pupils indicate that attainment remained low although the progress made by pupils improved on 2009. Progress was satisfactory in mathematics but inadequate in English. Results for Year 2 pupils improved on 2009 and were broadly average in mathematics. However, they remain low overall. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge, skills and understanding which are well below those expected for their age. They make satisfactory or better progress by the time they enter Year 1.

The school now has a thorough system for assessing pupils' performance, recording their progress and analysing the information with reference to specific groups. Teachers increasingly use the information to identify pupils who require additional help and to confirm specific gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

The school's assessment information identified improving progress for pupils in Year 6 last year, especially in writing. Pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals made better progress than their peers as did those who speak English as an additional language. However, the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was below that of their peers. Progress for some other year groups is below expectations, especially in mathematics. The school has recognised this issue and teachers are adopting strategies to improve pupils' ability to talk about mathematical problems and to apply their skills.

In lessons, pupils make at least satisfactory progress. They settle to work promptly and discuss their work willingly with their partners. They enjoy practical activities. However, they often lack confidence in speaking in front of the class or answering teachers' questions, especially if an extended response is sought. Although pupils

make satisfactory progress in most lessons, this is not enough for many to reach the level of performance expected for their age. Often, pupils understand what they have to do but their basic skills are not secure enough to enable them to work independently or to apply them effectively.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards in English and mathematics to at least the national average – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' self confidence and attitudes to school are improving. In the lessons observed and around the school, pupils' behaviour was at least satisfactory and often good. Pupils get on well together and respond well to adults. They say that they feel safe and are confident that they can report any problems that they have. They are proud of the money that they have raised for charity. In a Year 3 lesson, pupils showed good knowledge of food types, contributing to their understanding of how to eat healthily.

Pupils' attendance for the last academic year remained low overall with a higher than average proportion of pupils who were persistently absent. The school has made attendance a major priority this term. There are now regular rewards for 100% attendance and these are presented in assemblies. Weekly attendance is celebrated and compared across the school. There is a regular newsletter for parents. The school analyses attendance data closely. The parents of pupils with irregular attendance receive calls on the first day of any absence. As a result, attendance this term has improved and is closing the gap on the average nationally. However, it remains too low. The number of pupils arriving late has reduced by 70% compared with 2009.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase attendance to at least the national average – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. Teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory and around half was good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and now plan lessons carefully to gain pupils' interest. They use practical activities well to motivate pupils such as when exploring how cars run down different ramps in science or providing opportunities for pupils to question the teacher in role as a character from a novel. Teachers' use of questions varies in quality. In the best examples, teachers challenge pupils to provide extended answers and give them time for discussion. They also demonstrate how to compose a more detailed

response. However, in other lessons, questions draw short answers and do not extend learning.

Improved systems for assessment enable teachers to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers now plan lessons using precise objectives. Increasingly, they specify outcomes for success related to pupils' differing abilities and ensure that work is carefully matched to their different needs. This often involves guided work with groups of pupils led by the teacher or teaching assistant. The quality of this work varies. At best, the assistant uses correct subject language and knowledge to extend the learning of pupils. However, on occasions, assistants concentrate more on completing the task and managing behaviour.

The school has introduced pupil self-assessment in all classes and this was a prominent feature in the lessons observed. Pupils are becoming more confident in evaluating how well they have understood their work. The policy for marking pupils' work and providing feedback on how to improve has been revised. Teachers are expected to comment on the next step that pupils should take. There are some very good examples of these comments which are clear and well focused. However, the quality and frequency of comments still varies too much between classes. In some cases, there are too few comments or they are too general to help pupils to improve their work.

The school has introduced a range of planned whole-day activities to promote writing and numeracy, such as 'Apple Day' which celebrated local agriculture but also developed skills in mathematics. In Year 6 this year, each teacher takes responsibility for either English or mathematics and teaches the subject to both classes, with grouping focused more accurately on pupils' abilities and needs. Pupils say that they enjoy learning and value the trips and events outside lessons.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. The school has reviewed procedures and criteria for identifying pupils with special educational needs. Teachers now receive better information to help them set targets for pupils. There is a full range of intervention programmes to meet pupils' differing needs across the school. Teaching assistants have been trained to lead these small group programmes. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and the information is used in planning what the next stage of support should be. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are assessed on entry to the school and there are developing strategies to provide them with support which includes the use of bilingual teaching assistants.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has worked well with senior leaders to raise the morale and confidence of staff and pupils. The school has made contributions to local events and hosted the Mayor recently. Pupils report their pride in making a contribution to the school. Staff have also engaged parents through a series of performances and events and through more regular reports on pupils' progress. Basic procedures to ensure pupils' safety are in place.

Since the last visit, senior leaders have set high expectations and developed new policies and procedures to improve provision and generate greater consistency across the school. Systems for recording assessments and analysing pupils' progress now provide a sound basis for staff to identify important gaps in learning and pupils who require additional support. The revised policy on assessment is evident in all classrooms. The headteacher has introduced a regular cycle for monitoring provision and outcomes across the school which involves the governing body and middle leaders. Middle leaders are now confident in describing the action they are taking. They are developing the skills to evaluate the impact of these actions. The headteacher maintains a cumulative record of lesson observations, detailing the strengths of each teacher and areas for development. Her assessment of teaching is accurate.

The governing body has reviewed its procedures for making visits to the school to see performance directly. Its members have also revised their committee structure to monitor the key priority areas. A governor has recently taken responsibility for identifying training opportunities and matching them to individual governor's needs. The minutes of the governing body show an increasing range of questions which indicate that the ability to hold the school to account is improving.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the effectiveness of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support for the school. A range of consultants and specialists make regular visits to work alongside teachers and to provide training. The main focus of each visit is carefully recorded as are the actions recommended. Advisory governors attend meetings regularly and offer effective guidance to the governing body. The school's progress is reviewed regularly at joint meetings between the local authority and the governing body. The evidence of progress is thoroughly evaluated by the School Improvement Partner.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in speaking and listening, especially in building more detailed oral responses.