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17 February 2011

Mrs A Webb
Acting Headteacher
Pontefract St Giles Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant School
Skinner Lane
Pontefract
West Yorkshire
WF8 1HG

Dear Mrs Webb

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Pontefract St Giles Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Mrs Rajinder Harrison, additional inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 February 2011, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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 – inadequate

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 20 July 2010

- Take immediate action to ensure that a strong, stable leadership and management team is in place in order to promote a secure capacity to improve.
- Improve pupils' progress and raise attainment, particularly in English, mathematics and science by:
 - establishing and implementing robust procedures to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching
 - making learning consistently relevant, exciting and challenging for pupils of all abilities
 - creating more opportunities for independent learning.
- Improve attendance by:
 - regularly and rigorously analysing patterns of attendance of different groups of pupils
 - building the partnerships with parents and carers and continuing to work with the local authority's education welfare service to reduce term-time holidays and persistent absence.

Special measures: monitoring of Pontefract St Giles Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 February 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including nine parts of lessons and scrutinised documents, including the responses of parents, carers and pupils to questionnaires issued by the school. Meetings were held with the interim headteacher and other nominated staff, members of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection, a substantive headteacher has been appointed who will take up post on 1 April 2011. A new interim headteacher has led the school since September, supported during the autumn term by an additional acting headteacher on a part-time basis. An associate headteacher has been working with the school for one day each week since September, focusing on the monitoring of teaching and learning and providing support for two newly qualified teachers. The school has been affected by significant staff absence over a sustained period, including the long-term absence of the two assistant headteachers. Currently, there are five staff working at the school on a temporary basis, including an acting deputy headteacher who has been seconded by the local authority until 31 July 2011. The governing body has been replaced with an Interim Executive Board (IEB) that met for the first time in November 2010.

In January 2011, the school was badly damaged as a result of pipe bursts that led to substantial flooding. Subsequently, pupils have been taught on four separate sites. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are currently being taught at a secondary school located 10 minutes drive from the school; pupils in Years 3 and 4 are housed in the parish hall connected to a neighbouring primary school, while Key Stage 1 pupils have returned recently to school from their temporary base at a nearby community centre. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have continued to be taught at St Giles throughout this period.

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

Pupils are not achieving as well as they should because the pace of learning is too slow to raise attainment to the levels expected for their age. In summer 2010, Year 6 pupils did not take the statutory tests. Leaders acknowledge that they do not have an accurate view about the attainment of these pupils because related assessment information was unreliable. Published data confirm that, in summer 2010, fewer than half of Year 2 pupils attained the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap widened between pupils' performance and that seen nationally, particularly in reading and mathematics.

The acting deputy headteacher has secured an accurate baseline from which to measure pupils' progress in English and mathematics. Analysis of the data indicates that pupils in all year groups are performing well-below expected levels, although there are some early indications that, for some groups of pupils, the gap in performance is beginning to close. However, a whole-school approach to track pupils' progress over time has not been established. This limits the value of data as a tool to support learning.

In lessons, the quality of learning is variable and not consistently good enough to counter underachievement. Learning is most effective where expectations are high and pupils are fully engaged in activities that have been tailored to meet their needs. However, more often, activities are not pitched correctly to extend pupils' learning and tasks are frequently too easy. Occasionally, instances of poor behaviour are not managed effectively enough which hinders other pupils' learning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve pupils' progress and raise attainment, particularly in English, mathematics and science – inadequate

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour was judged satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. However, leaders report that behaviour deteriorated significantly during the autumn term reflecting, in part, the turbulence arising from staff absence. Behaviour in lessons has since improved because management strategies are generally applied consistently. However, on the first day of inspection, instances of poor behaviour were observed at lunchtime when Key Stage 1 pupils were not supervised appropriately. Attitudes to learning vary and reflect the quality of teaching. Furthermore, pupils have not all established good work habits to enable them to sustain suitable levels of concentration throughout the day.

The learning mentor has implemented a very clear action plan that includes a range of strategies, supported by external agencies, to improve attendance. New policies for good attendance are being embraced by pupils, teachers and parents. Persistent absence is followed up more rigorously and the school has raised parents' awareness about the importance of not taking holidays during term time. School leaders have a more accurate view of attendance patterns because of regular checks made on the attendance of targeted groups of pupils. Although the impact of actions taken so far is not reflected in sustained improvement in attendance, leaders are in a much stronger position to tackle pupils' absence.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve attendance – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has not improved sufficiently to accelerate pupils' learning and raise their achievement. Crucially, teachers do not all know the levels that pupils have already attained and available assessment information is not used routinely to tailor lesson planning to meet individual needs. Activities are less reliant on worksheets and seek to engage pupils more actively. However, scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that activities do not always build sequentially to reinforce or extend prior learning. Teachers do not routinely check pupils' progress or provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. Scrutiny of work books revealed some good examples of marking, but little evidence to suggest that comments were used by pupils to inform their next steps. Improvements to teaching have also been hampered by significant staff absence and the challenges presented by the relocation of pupils after the school was flooded. For example, lesson observations, led by the associate headteacher, have identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching, but opportunities to discuss and share good practice are reduced because teachers have been dispersed across four sites.

Despite significant weaknesses in teaching, there are some stronger features that are beginning to close gaps in pupils' learning. For example, effective questioning probed and extended pupils' thinking and practical role-play activities built pupils' confidence to work independently and in small groups. Early improvements to the learning environment in the autumn term were stalled following the destruction of many displays of work. However, teachers, particularly in Years 3 and 4 have succeeded in creating positive learning environments in temporary accommodation. This reflects the commitment of the staff team to tackle key priorities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has managed a period of significant turbulence and change effectively. With the support of the additional acting headteacher, the associate headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher, she has identified and tackled barriers to progress with determination. She acknowledges that progress was slow because of the extent and complexity of challenges that arose in the time immediately following the inspection. However, a recent period of greater stability has resulted in some 'green shoots of recovery' that provide firmer foundations.

Leadership has been restructured to strengthen capacity at senior level and responsibilities for subject areas have been realigned to meet the school's needs more effectively. However, a strategic and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions taken to raise attainment has not been established. In addition, the local authority's role in holding the school to account is unclear. The school improvement plan identifies appropriate priorities for action. However, success criteria are not focused sharply enough on pupils' outcomes. Furthermore, interim milestone checks are not quantified sufficiently to enable progress to be measured in the short and medium term.

Recently appointed subject leaders in English, mathematics and science have completed self-evaluations of their leadership skills. Although new to their roles, they are clear about the expectations of them and are beginning to implement strategies to improve the quality of provision in their subject areas. Currently, however, they are not involved in monitoring or evaluation across the school.

Members of the IEB have quickly gained an accurate view of the challenges facing the school. They have acted decisively to appoint a substantive headteacher and are following procedures rigorously to resolve long-term staff absence issues, which remain a significant obstacle to progress.

Leaders have worked hard, during a period of uncertainty when pupils required temporary accommodation, to improve communication with parents and carers to increase attendance. School leaders have valued highly the support provided by parents and carers who volunteered to help with the 'clean up' following the flood and who help supervise 'walking buses' to transfer pupils to and from the neighbouring primary school.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Take immediate action to ensure that a strong, stable leadership and management team is in place in order to promote a secure capacity to improve – satisfactory

External support

Evaluation by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors judged that the local authority's statement of action required amendment, particularly related to the intended strategies to monitor and evaluate the impact of support. Although the local authority officer advised the lead inspector that a revised version had been submitted to Ofsted, a copy was not available during the inspection.

The local authority has provided helpful support to strengthen leadership capacity through the appointment of the interim headteacher from September and the acting deputy headteacher, seconded to the school in November. Governance has also been strengthened following the decision to replace the governing body with an IEB. The project manager deployed by the local authority to oversee the repairs to the school building has worked effectively to ensure that deadlines for completion of repairs are met. Consequently, the school is almost ready for all pupils to return. The support provided by the associate headteacher has also been valued greatly by newly qualified teachers and observations have resulted in helpful training, for example, in improving the quality of the learning environment.

Nevertheless, while the practical support provided by the local authority has been appreciated, the pace of its implementation following the last inspection was initially slow. At present, the provision of support is not coordinated fully with the priorities identified in the school improvement plan and the mechanism by which the local authority will monitor and evaluate the impact of support has not been established. The School Improvement Adviser,

appointed by the local authority to support the school from January 2011, is aware that this is a priority to demonstrate the progress made by the school in forthcoming months.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the use of assessment to inform planning that takes into account pupils' prior learning and increases the level of challenge for all pupils.
- Establish a system to evaluate the impact of teaching strategies on learning.
- Develop the role of middle leaders so that they can take greater responsibility for their area of accountability.