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Friday 24 September 2010

Mrs Kathy Weston
St James' CofE Primary School
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Dear Mrs Weston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St James' CofE Primary School

Following my visit with Sally Hall, Additional Inspector, to your school on Wednesday 22 and Thursday 23 September 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Herefordshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Hereford.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St James' CofE Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on Wednesday 22 and Thursday 23 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The former headteacher left the school shortly after the inspection in March 2010. A deputy headteacher from within the local authority was appointed as acting headteacher for the summer term. Following a standard recruitment process, the acting headteacher was appointed as substantive headteacher with effect from September 2010. All other teachers have remained in post.

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

The school has taken action to identify and support pupils who have fallen behind in their learning. Intervention work has been successful in enabling a small number of individual pupils to make rapid progress in their learning and start to plug the gaps resulting from underachievement in the past. This has been particularly effective for pupils in Years 2 and 6 during the summer term. Learning in lessons for the majority of pupils, however, remains too slow and most pupils are not progressing sufficiently quickly to enable them to reach the standards of attainment expected for their age. The school's own assessment data indicate that the declining attainment for pupils in Key Stage 1 has not been stopped. The proportion of pupils on track to reach nationally expected standards by the end of Year 2 in 2011 is well below the current national average, particularly in writing and mathematics. Improvements for pupils in Key Stage 2 indicate that improved attainment seen in the summer term is likely to be sustained in English, although improved attainment in mathematics is unlikely to be maintained.

Work seen in lessons and in pupils' books shows that significant shortcomings in attainment remain. Pupils' writing skills are under-developed. For example, the most able pupils in Year 6 do not have a secure understanding of the key features of the standard of writing expected for pupils of their age, such as the use of complex sentences and adventurous vocabulary. Their understanding of the features of different writing genres is limited. Handwriting is not consistent and too many pupils, even in Year 6, do not write in a cursive script. Work is not consistently well presented in pupils' books. Pupils' mathematical skills are under-developed. For example, pupils in Year 5 struggle with simple problem-solving and calculation strategies. The progress seen in work in pupils' books, throughout the school, during

the summer term was not rapid enough to enable them to catch up and meet the standards expected of them

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase attainment and rates of progress, especially in writing and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are generally well behaved and courteous around the school. They relate well to adults and have a sound regard for their own safety. In lessons, behaviour is not consistently good enough because classroom routines are not firmly established and discourteous behaviour is tolerated by teachers.

The effectiveness of provision

Far too much teaching is not good enough to enable pupils to make the progress they are capable of. This is because teachers do not use assessment effectively to determine what pupils already know and then plan suitable learning activities to enable them to make progress. The majority of lessons are poorly planned and lack clear learning intentions or criteria against which progress can be measured. As a result, too often both teachers and pupils are unclear about what the pupils are learning. In the majority of lessons observed, pupils were unable to explain what they were learning about and, occasionally, were not able to explain what they had to do. The activities which the pupils undertake do not always build on the teaching input at the start of the lesson. Teacher's expectations of what pupils are capable of and how much they should achieve in a lesson are frequently too low. Pupils are rarely challenged to perform well. Classroom routines are not well established, leading to a slow pace of learning, pupils drifting off task and inappropriate behaviour such as pupils calling out in lessons. The exception to this is in the Early Years Foundation Stage where pupils who have only been in school for a few days are already settling well into classroom routines. A useful teaching strategy seen in several lessons was to ask pupils to discuss ideas in pairs. However, expectations about how pupils should do this are not clear and, too often, this time is wasted as pupils do not engage in appropriate dialogue.

Opportunities for teachers and pupils to assess learning during lessons are too infrequent. Consequently, pupils do not know how well they are doing and are not sufficiently challenged to achieve more. Pupils are not always given sufficient time to think for themselves because teachers interrupt them too quickly or they simply ask a question and then answer it themselves. This frequently results in opportunities being missed to draw on pupils' own knowledge and understanding. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to work independently. Consequently, their ability to work unaided is limited, which, in turn, restricts the amount of time teachers have to provide focused support to individuals and groups without being interrupted. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length. When such activities have been successfully planned pupils clearly demonstrate what they are capable of. For

example, some extensive writing was seen in books from Year 1 pupils in the summer term.

Pupils' work is marked routinely and the quality of this marking has improved considerably since the last inspection. Developmental marking is starting to be used consistently throughout the school. Pupils routinely receive a combination of praise and an area for development when their work is marked. However, this guidance is not always used well by pupils themselves to help them move on in their learning. The marking does not make sufficient links to the intended learning. There is little evidence in pupils' books of peer- or self-assessment.

The issue of the inadequate provision for learning outdoors in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been addressed successfully. Resources in the outdoor area are now safe and clean. All aspects of learning are planned in this area and children have good opportunities to move between the indoor and outdoor environments. However, planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage lacks detail and opportunities to extend children's learning and development are missed. Adults do not communicate enough with the children through conversation and modelling behaviours.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Address the issue of inadequate outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by September 2010 – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher has been very effective in establishing a clear educational direction and supporting the senior leadership team to drive forward school improvement. Although the team is inexperienced, they work very effectively together and take advantage of opportunities to develop their skills. The governing body is not at full strength and acknowledges that it does not fully hold the school to account for its work. The school has prepared and implemented a plan of monitoring and evaluation activities. However, the plan lacks sufficient detail about the scope and purpose of the activities. Consequently, it is difficult for the governing body to understand what the school is doing and how to challenge it. The headteacher's reports to the governing body show that information is being shared but there is too little focus on the evidence of impact of the school's actions to bring about improvements.

The school has prepared a raising achievement plan which is fit for purpose and focuses the school on the most pressing priorities. However, although success criteria are included, there are not sufficient milestones to measure smaller steps of improvement. The plan includes appropriate support from the local authority as well as learning from good practice in other schools.

Reports from monitoring and evaluation work are inconsistent. Records of work scrutiny are suitably detailed. They show good links to previous targets and report

on an appropriate balance between provision and learning. They are a good example of the benefits of working with consultants from the local authority. Records of lesson observations are less helpful because they are insufficiently detailed. The brief notes are too focused on provision with little evaluation of learning. Judgements are not consistently supported by evidence. It is not clear how they are being used to improve teaching and learning as there is no evidence of developmental targets, follow up or evaluation criteria.

The school has very recently introduced a detailed system to assess and track the attainment of pupils. This is being used effectively to identify and support pupils who are not attaining as well as they should or who have made too little progress over time. At the current time the school has not collected sufficient data to enable it to demonstrate progress over shorter periods of time.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and rigour of monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to develop clear plans for realistic and measurable improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has prepared a suitable statement of action to support the school. It has implemented actions for improvement with mixed success. For example, it is providing a suitable level of support to develop the monitoring and evaluation skills of the new leadership team. Joint lesson observations and working with senior leaders on work scrutiny have been beneficial. However, important actions planned for the summer term 2010 to improve lesson planning has not been successful. This work has not been monitored effectively by the local authority and, consequently, lesson planning remains a weakness which is inhibiting the progress the school is making. Pupils are not making sufficient progress as a result. The target set in the statement of action for the proportion of good or better teaching at the end of the summer term has still not been met.