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26 May 2011

Mrs K Weston
Headteacher
St James' CofE Primary school
Vicarage Road
Hereford
HR1 2QN

Dear Mrs Weston

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

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 May 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. 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 Director of Children's Services for Herefordshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Hereford.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Increase attainment and rates of progress, especially in writing and mathematics by:
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school
 - ensuring better use of assessment information to challenge and support all pupils to do their best
 - developing more effective systems for tracking pupils' progress in order that underperformance can be more quickly identified and remedied
 - improving the quality of written feedback to pupils so that they are clearer about what they need to do to improve their work.

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

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

Special measures: monitoring of St James' CofE Primary school

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 May 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the governing body and an officer from the local authority.

Context

Since the second monitoring visit, one of the teachers in Key Stage 2 has retired. Teaching in Year 5 has been reorganised so that there is no longer a job share arrangement.

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

School data indicate that the progress made by pupils in writing and mathematics has increased since the previous monitoring visit. The improvement is more consistent throughout the school in mathematics than in writing. Virtually all pupils have made progress similar to that expected for pupils of their age over the past two terms in writing and mathematics. Approximately half of pupils have made accelerated progress. Progress is now more even as inconsistencies between year groups are diminishing. School data indicate that attainment has risen for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 since the last inspection. For pupils in Year 2, attainment is now in line with the national average in mathematics but remains low in reading and writing. For pupils in Year 6, attainment in English and mathematics is just below the national average. In other year groups attainment is well below national expectations. It is particularly low in Year 3 and Year 5, especially in writing.

Pupils' work indicates that most pupils are now making satisfactory progress over time in writing. However, the limited opportunities for extended writing, particularly in Years 2 and 4, are preventing pupils from making the accelerated progress they need to in order to attain the standards expected for their age. The most able pupils do not consistently make sufficiently rapid progress to reach the higher levels of which they are capable.

Progress made by pupils in lessons has improved since the previous monitoring visit. However, it is inconsistent, ranging from good to inadequate. There are still not enough lessons where pupils make sufficiently rapid progress to enable them to make up for underachievement in the past. Presentation of pupils' work remains inconsistent. Pupils throughout the school lack a fluent joined style of handwriting.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils have positive attitudes to their work. They respond particularly well when teachers set high expectations through challenging and interesting tasks. Pupils are courteous and respectful to each other and to adults.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous monitoring visit, particularly in Years 2, 3 and 6. Consistently good teaching was observed in Year 3, which is reflected in the improving quality of work in pupils' books. The proportion of inadequate teaching is declining.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers plan engaging and motivating activities which successfully challenge pupils of all abilities. Classrooms are well managed and teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Teachers use questioning well to assess learning and to challenge pupils' thinking. Consequently, pupils make satisfactory or better progress at these times. However, there remain too many lessons where pupils make only limited progress. This is because activities are not sufficiently well matched to pupils' individual needs and teachers' expectations of what pupils should learn are not clear. Assessment is not used well enough during these lessons to monitor learning and provide well-structured activities to enable the pupils to make good or better progress. Consequently, the pace of learning is too slow.

Although teaching assistants are deployed well to support less able pupils and help manage behaviour in the most effective lessons, their role is not consistently well developed. For example, in a minority of lessons they are not given sufficiently clear guidance to enable them to support learning effectively. In the worst cases, imprecise guidance confuses pupils and impedes progress.

Marking has continued to improve. It is conscientious and detailed. There is a consistent approach to providing pupils with clear guidance about what they have done well and what they need to improve. Most of the older pupils respond well to this guidance. There were some excellent challenging questions written by the teacher in Year 2 books, but these had not been responded to by the pupils. Helpful checklists have been introduced in Years 5 and 6 and these are helping to focus pupils on the planned learning.

The outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well resourced and is being used as part of the planned daily curriculum. However, children are not receiving the maximum benefit from the outdoor environment because activities are not planned well enough to provide a wide range of appropriate and engaging activities throughout each day. Currently a role play building site has been created and this is

providing a good level of stimulation for the children. However, the choice of activities available varied during the inspection. At times, choice was limited and relatively few children chose to participate in activities outdoors. When a wider and more imaginative range of activities was provided later in the inspection, children were more enthusiastic and the proportion of children choosing to work and play outside increased considerably.

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 school and the local authority have responded well to feedback from the second monitoring visit. They have taken immediate and effective action to address the shortcomings in teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and pupils' rates of progress have increased. Lesson observations are being used systematically to monitor the quality of teaching, identify precise targets and improve classroom practice. This strategy is effective in bringing about rapid improvement in the quality of teaching in some classes, particularly in Years 2, 3 and 6. However, in other year groups the pace of progress has been limited. When development opportunities have been less successful, teachers are repeatedly receiving the same development points, but are making no significant improvements.

The leadership of the school remains too heavily dependent on the headteacher. The effectiveness of subject leadership is underdeveloped because too few members of staff have the necessary skills and expertise to carry out these duties. Two scrutinies of mathematics work, carried out by the subject coordinator, identified the same development points, for example giving pupils time to respond to teachers' feedback in marking, with no evidence of the impact of this work. Planning scrutinies in mathematics have been more successful in helping teachers to identify suitable questions to include in their planning. Scrutiny of English work has begun, although the school's limited leadership capacity is impeding development in this subject. The governing body has taken action to strengthen the leadership of the school with the appointment of a deputy headteacher who will take up her post in September 2011.

The school and local authority have evaluated the impact of improvement work accurately. Consequently, they have a good understanding of the most pressing areas for further development. The raising achievement plan has been suitably adapted to address the newly identified priorities. There are clear signs of success, such as with the focused individual support for teachers. However, some objectives lack sufficiently detailed and appropriate actions to address them. For example, the actions planned to improve teachers' assessment skills.

The governing body has been strengthened further with the appointment of two new governors, bringing a broader range of expertise to the governing body. It has

a good understanding of the improvements that the school has made through clear information provided by the headteacher. The governing body is appropriately involved in holding the school to account, including taking a wider view of school performance than just the improvement areas identified at the previous inspection. For example, declining attendance figures are being monitored. This is the result of the good level of information provided by the headteacher.

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 worked with the school to identify and address the improvements necessary to raise the quality of teaching. Support for the school has been refocused appropriately and this work is already proving effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Visits to other schools have continued, for example to develop understanding about outstanding provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.