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27 May 2011

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

Dear Mrs Gibbons

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

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 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 second 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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

January 2011



Annex
The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in 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 second monitoring inspection from 25 to 26 May 2011

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, including nine parts of lessons and two assemblies. Documents were scrutinised and meetings held with the headteacher and other nominated staff, a groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the School Improvement Adviser.

Context

Following the last inspection, all pupils returned to the school as the repairs to the building following the flood were completed on schedule. The new substantive headteacher took up her post at the beginning of the summer term. The acting headteacher who previously led the school has continued to provide support for leaders one day each week. Two members of staff are on a phased return to work following a period of absence and overall, staffing has stabilised. During this inspection, interviews were being held for the substantive post of deputy headteacher.

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

Pupils are enjoying their lessons more and are making better progress because of improvements in behaviour, the quality of teaching and the curriculum. However, leaders recognise that while teachers have worked hard to plug gaps in their learning, results from external assessments taken by pupils currently in Year 6 are unlikely to exceed the minimum targets expected for their age in English and mathematics. This reflects a period of underachievement that resulted from lack of continuity in provision and too much teaching that was inadequate in the past.

In the most effective lessons, learning proceeds at a brisk pace because teachers plan an interesting range of activities that are engaging and provide challenge for pupils of all abilities. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt. Sometimes, the pace of learning slows because teachers over-direct activities and restrict the opportunities for pupils to work independently. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to extend pupils' learning, particularly the more able, when initial tasks set have proved easy.

The headteacher has taken swift action to raise achievement and attainment in the medium and long term. A training day to review current assessment information has raised staff awareness of the gaps in pupils' learning and leaders have established an overview of progress made by different groups of pupils. Although the reliability of some data collected in the past is under question, leaders are more confident in the accuracy of information

currently being gathered by staff. Consequently, the school is on track to establish a secure baseline from which to measure future progress accurately by the end of the summer term.

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

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved since the last inspection. This improvement is underpinned by the 'fresh start' that has resulted from a very positive return to school by pupils following repairs to the buildings. Pupils speak highly of the much improved learning environment and like the clear expectations communicated consistently through the new behaviour code. The rewards scheme has proved particularly popular with pupils, who compete keenly in teams to win prizes for their efforts. A strong community spirit has been established in a short time as exemplified by a whole-school assembly where pupils and staff sang together enthusiastically. Good levels of supervision by staff at the end of playtimes ensure that pupils return to lessons in a calm and orderly fashion.

Improvements in attendance have been sustained since the last monitoring inspection and are broadly in line with the national average. The learning mentor has highlighted the importance of regular attendance with parents and carers through regular newsletters and the proportion of pupils taking holidays during term time has fallen. Pupils take pride in the displays that celebrate the high attendance of individuals and groups of pupils. Leaders are beginning to develop a more detailed insight into the reasons for variations in the attendance of different groups of pupils through analysis of data gathered.

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

- Improve attendance – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving and the proportion that is inadequate has reduced significantly. This is because teachers are using agreed procedures consistently to ensure that pupils' needs are met more effectively and teaching is less frequently disrupted by incidents of inappropriate behaviour.

A newly introduced curriculum programme provides a clear framework from which teachers can plan activities that are more accurately pitched to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Planning follows a common format and activities are sequenced to ensure clear progression towards intended learning outcomes. Teachers are developing their skills in tailoring activities to meet the needs of different groups of pupils, although this remains variable between classes. Additional adults are deployed more effectively to work with targeted pupils and are beginning to play a more active role in supporting their learning.

The best teaching is characterised by practical activities that engage and sustain pupils' interest and add an element of excitement to their learning. For example, in a design technology lesson, Year 4 pupils greatly enjoyed creating a healthy sandwich that included ingredients they had grown themselves. Good questioning tests pupils' understanding and enables them to build on prior learning. However, while there are emerging strengths in teaching, some inconsistencies remain. Planning does not routinely link activities to assessment criteria so that pupils' progress can be measured precisely over time. Opportunities are missed to ensure that all pupils participate in activities, for example, through the use of personal mini whiteboards or modern technologies. Teachers do not always direct pupils to the good quality wall displays that provide helpful information to support learning and enable them to work independently. A sample of work books indicates that teachers are using the school's marking policy more consistently. While there remains some variation in its quality, written feedback is usually constructive and offers guidance about how to improve.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since her arrival, the headteacher has provided a clear vision for school improvement. She has a good understanding of the school's priorities and is working systematically to overcome remaining obstacles to progress. The headteacher has successfully united the school community following a period of significant disruption. She has enthused staff by communicating clear expectations about what pupils should achieve and increasing opportunities for them to share and develop good practice through regular staff meetings. An air of optimism has been established and staff teams across the school show high levels of commitment in responding to key priorities.

The headteacher has been supported well by the acting deputy headteacher during a period of intensive activity. She has encouraged middle leaders to become more accountable for their area of responsibility, providing good support to develop their leadership skills. Subject leaders in English, mathematics and science are developing their skills in monitoring and evaluation and have valued the additional support from the previous acting headteacher and a member of the IEB. Having completed reviews of teachers' planning and pupils' work, they are gaining a more reliable picture about strengths and weaknesses in their subject area. While new arrangements for curriculum planning and systems to track pupils' progress are in their infancy, teachers speak with confidence about how these initiatives are already influencing and improving their planning and practice. This is because training workshops and staff meetings have been delivered effectively so that the aims of each initiative are clearly understood. Records of lesson observations indicate that senior leaders are establishing an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching. However, not enough time has elapsed for leaders to evaluate the impact of different teaching strategies on the quality of learning for different groups of pupils.

The IEB has continued to provide good levels of challenge and support based on a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. An additional appointment to the IEB,

by the local authority, has strengthened its capacity further to address staffing and structural issues.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- 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

The local authority's revised statement of action was made available to Her Majesty's Inspector by the school prior to this monitoring inspection. Support has been tailored well to meet the school's needs as an outcome of useful discussions between the headteacher, the Chair of the IEB and the School Improvement Adviser. For example, support from a consultant and an advanced skills teacher has improved the quality of teaching and behaviour management strategies, particularly in Key Stage 1. Middle leadership skills have also improved as a result of the continued support brokered by the local authority. In addition, pupils and staff have enjoyed greatly the opportunities presented through the local authority's 'Music in Action' programme which enriches the curriculum through regular singing classes for all year groups.