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24 November 2011

Mrs G Bush
Headteacher
Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School
St Peter's Avenue
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Dear Mrs Bush

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit with Mr Peter Jones, additional inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 November 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 June 2011. 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 Interim Executive board, the Diocesan Director of Education for Wakefield Diocese and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for Calderdale.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCauley
Additional inspector

January 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- Raise attainment and improve achievement in all subjects, but particularly in writing, by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills in a range of subjects
 - using assessment information from the Early Years Foundation Stage to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good throughout the school by:
 - making sure pupils know how to improve their work through better-quality marking and feedback
 - ensuring work planned takes account of pupils' previous learning and reflects pupils' interests and abilities
 - ensuring teachers use the skills of teaching assistants more effectively.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - setting challenging targets that are clearly based on pupils' standards when they join Year 1
 - embedding the tracking of pupils' performance so that rapid action can be taken to tackle underachievement
 - ensuring that leaders and managers set a clear direction for school improvement
 - applying school systems rigorously and working more effectively with parents and carers to improve pupils' attendance.

Special measures: monitoring of Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 November 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with school leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the ex Chair of the Governing Body, an independent educational consultant employed by the school, a representative of the local authority and a Local Leader of Education (LLE) who is a local headteacher. Inspectors also spoke with pupils and staff in classrooms and around the school. They observed eight lessons and scrutinised pupils' work around school and in exercise books. Reviews and reports of the school's performance were also scrutinised.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2011, a few staffing changes have already taken place or are planned for January 2012. One teacher joined Key Stage 1 in September 2011 and one teacher will be leaving a Key Stage 2 post in December 2011. The process to appoint a new teacher for January 2012 is well under way. A number of staff roles and responsibilities were changed at the beginning of this term. An IEB has been constituted by the local authority and members of the board met for the first time during this monitoring inspection.

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

Pupils' attainment and achievement were reported on comprehensively at the time of the last inspection. During the monitoring inspection inspectors found pupils' attainment remains low and progress in lessons is variable. Some teachers are beginning to build time into their lessons for pupils to practise their basic skills. Pupils' progress and ultimately their achievement vary in lessons between inadequate and good because of the variability in the quality of teaching. Small improvements made in pupils' attainment at the end of last academic year are fragile. The use of assessment information from the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not currently sufficiently embedded to bring about further improvement. School leaders are at an early stage of setting attainment and learning targets in reading, writing and mathematics and using this assessment information.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment and improve achievement in all subjects, but particularly in writing – inadequate

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Many pupils are passive in lessons and do not generally cause disruption. When challenging behaviour was observed in a lesson the teacher and teaching assistants managed the

situation well. The vast majority of pupils are keen to learn, although some have not always attended school as regularly as they could have but their attendance is now slightly better.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching in lessons varies between good and inadequate. In a minority of lessons pupils are enthusiastic to move their learning forward at a fast pace because of effective teaching. In a few lessons pupils are not provided with sufficient information or support in their learning ('scaffolding') to enable them to access independent learning tasks. The majority of teaching is satisfactory which is not sufficient to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress or improve their achievement. When planning lessons teachers plan for the needs of pupils of differing abilities, but this varies across classes. For example, not all teachers translate what they have planned for higher attaining pupils into practice. Pupils, particularly those who are more able, are insufficiently challenged in lessons. Learning time is wasted in a minority of lessons. Generally, teachers have insufficient knowledge of pupils' current levels of attainment to enable them to plan more precisely the next steps in learning required to ensure pupils make further progress. Many pupils know targets for improvement have been set for them. Not all pupils are aware of what their targets are or what they have to do in lessons to achieve them. Pupils' work is marked regularly by teachers. Some teachers consistently identify what pupils should do to improve their work, although this is not the case throughout the whole school. Teaching assistants are generally well briefed about their roles in lessons and provide appropriate support for pupils. In some lessons, though, they do not always enable pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. In many lessons pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported enabling them to be successful in their learning. The curriculum does not currently fully meet the needs of all pupils.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good throughout the school – inadequate

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and senior members of staff are in the early stages of beginning to secure improvement in key areas identified in the last inspection. School leaders, in particular the headteacher and senior leaders, need to take much greater responsibility for driving improvement. The headteacher restructured a number of leadership roles at the beginning of this academic year. The targets set by the school based on pupils' standards when they join Year 1 are appropriately challenging, although so far progress made by pupils towards these targets has not been measured or analysed by those responsible for leading the school. Consequently, the identification of pupils who are falling behind in their learning has not been carried out. These pupils are not being sufficiently well supported in their learning. Plans for improvement created by school leaders lack clarity and sharpness of focus on how their impact can be monitored and evaluated, therefore the potential for driving improvement is not being used. Senior leaders had noted a number of areas in which they

felt improvements had been made since the last inspection but were unable to substantiate many of these with clear evidence of gains in pupils' achievement. Attendance has increased slightly when compared to the same period of time from the autumn term last academic year. This is partly because no holidays are now authorised by the headteacher for pupils during term time. The IEB is focused on driving rapid improvement. Its members are focusing particularly on the capacity of leaders and managers to secure rapid improvement through the use of assessment information to inform lesson planning leading to improved achievement. A report on the outcomes of recent reviews of the school's progress, led by the local authority, was made available to inspectors during the monitoring inspection and matched many of its findings.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school – inadequate

External support

In a letter dated 26 October 2011 from Her Majesty's Inspectors, the local authority statement of action was judged to be not fit for purpose. The letter identified the need for amendments to the statement specifically because it omitted to identify sufficiently detailed actions showing how support would be provided and the timescales identified did not cover the full period before the projected time for the removal of special measures. The amended statement of action was made available to the inspection team during the monitoring visit and is now judged to be fit for purpose.

The local authority has provided sufficient challenge and support for the school since the last inspection. The work carried out by consultants with teachers has created a greater understanding among staff of what they should do to improve their classroom practice. Teachers have been given the opportunity to observe examples of effective classroom practice in Todmorden CE (VA) Junior and Infant School enabling them to consider how they may improve the way they teach. The LLE is providing valuable support for the headteacher and senior leaders to increase this leadership capacity. A number of well-focused opportunities are planned to support leadership development.

Priorities for further improvement

More rigour and urgency is required to secure rapid improvement in the areas identified at the last inspection in June 2011.