

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 1LH

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Serco**
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct T** 0121 683 3888



26 January 2012

Mrs H Richardson
Headteacher
The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston
Wyberton Low Road
Boston
PE21 7RZ

Dear Mrs Richardson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston

Following my visit with Ann Taylor, additional inspector, to your school on 24–25 January 2012, 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 30 March 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers should not be appointed at present.

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 Lincolnshire and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

David Martin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of good lessons and eliminating inadequate practice
 - ensuring the accuracy of assessment, with teachers rigorously using this information to plan next steps of learning
 - improving teachers' knowledge of progression in learning in English and mathematics
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - ensuring feedback clearly identifies the good features of work, how pupils can improve, and provides time for them to respond to the feedback given.

- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - appointing a leader to drive improvement in this stage of education
 - developing staff knowledge of a good Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and the place of observational assessment in planning children's learning
 - maximising opportunities for developing children's skills in reading, writing, calculating, and shape, space and measures across all areas of learning
 - ensuring there is an appropriate balance between teacher-led, child-chosen and indoor and outdoor learning
 - improving the quality of both indoor and outdoor environments, including learning resources.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - all leaders taking responsibility for ensuring pupils' good progress and high achievement
 - establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluating systems which include regular reviews of planning and pupils' work
 - agreeing aspirational targets for pupils which are used to ensure staff accountability
 - developing the role of the governing body in challenging underperformance and becoming more directly involved in the school's work.

Special measures: monitoring of The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 - 25 January 2012

Evidence

Inspectors looked into all aspects of the school's work, observed teaching staff and scrutinised planning and other documents. They met with the executive headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

There have been more minor changes to staffing. These changes have further strengthened the workforce in the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In most of the lessons seen during the inspection, the progress made by pupils was good, and in some cases was outstanding. In none of the lessons seen was progress slow or weak. The prior learning of pupils is used consistently well in planning and during lessons. This means that pupil progress is carefully checked within lessons, across a unit of work and over a 'short term'. Careful assessments are made against levels and sub-levels, and these are moderated both within the school and by external partners. As a result, the school has confidence in the accuracy of these assessments. Scrutiny of pupils' work, and inspector discussions with staff with pupil books as a focal point, indicate that this is the case.

Very rapid progress has been made since September. Assessments indicate that, after two 'short term' assessment points, pupils' current attainment overall is around average. This is a substantial achievement, given that attainment in Year 2 teacher assessments and Year 6 tests for the last few years has been significantly below national averages. Attainment was particularly weak in mathematics in Key Stage 2 tests in 2011, but pupils are currently attaining as well in mathematics as in English, with an above average proportion on track to achieve higher levels. Pupils in all year groups are making progress at a rate that is much faster than that seen in most schools. If this rate of progress continues, then, by the end of the year, pupils will make better progress than might be expected from their starting points on entry to the school. This means that previous underachievement over a significant period of time has not only been arrested, but the gaps in performance, particularly in mathematics, have already been closed half way through the academic year.

The performance of different groups, including by gender, ethnicity or disability and special educational need, are carefully tracked by the school. All groups now appear to make as good progress as their peers. Recent additional intervention strategies have identified those at risk of making less good progress. Monitoring by school

leaders and managers, and members of the governing body, shows that these intervention strategies are successful in raising attainment at an accelerated rate.

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

- raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics – good.

The quality of teaching

The detailed points for raising attainment also concern the quality of teaching. Improvements seen in teaching have clearly had a substantial impact on learning, as described above.

The current high quality of leadership and management in the school has made the raising of the quality of teaching the key priority. Through regular and well-focussed observation, strengths and weaknesses are identified. Very good team support and training has then been provided. This has incrementally continued to raise the quality of teaching to its current level, where most teaching is good.

Every classroom has very consistent systems and approaches. Planning is very thorough, using a similar approach across the school. Activities and learning outcomes are very well matched to the different needs of pupils. The learning environment is exemplary. Not only is display rich and exciting, but it is full of helpful learning prompts such as key words and phonics aids. Moreover, it is responsive to pupils' expressed interests and enthusiasms. This was seen in the reading corner in the form of a castle, which greatly inspired boys to participate. Marking is extremely thorough and helpful. Pupils respond to comments made by teachers, thereby improving their work. Older pupils have levels given for key pieces of work. This helps them to understand how well they are doing and what needs to be improved. Questioning seeks to involve all pupils and often probes understanding deeply.

As a result of these improvements, pupils are very aware of their next steps in learning. From the last visit, there is a noticeable improvement in pupils' enjoyment of learning. They are all very focussed in class and always busily engaged and productive. Topics are taught in interesting ways that often create a genuine sense of discovery and delight. Teaching assistants are very well deployed, supporting pupils in a variety of effective ways. They do not encourage reliance, but help pupils who may find learning more difficult to find answers for themselves. This is boosting pupils' confidence and creating perseverance in learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

This was not an area of weakness at the previous inspection, but improvements have nonetheless been seen since that time. Behaviour in lessons was always good and often outstanding during the visit. Adults manage pupils' behaviour very skilfully

and consistently in the classroom and beyond, with a focus on recognising and praising positive conduct. Relationships are warm and respectful in all interactions between pupils and with adults. Systems to keep children safe are comprehensive and effective, and pupils say that they feel safe. There is good support for those that might be more vulnerable. Attendance and punctuality is improving well and is now better than average. The school is proactive in encouraging attendance, for example through working with parents and carers to prevent pupils losing learning because of term-time holidays.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher has provided a strong role model of high expectations, exceptional professional skills and unstinting support, and has created a stable workforce. She is ably supported by three assistant headteachers who have increasingly helped to shape the strong vision and ambition into effective team working right across the school. Their knowledge of the performance of pupils and key developments in provision is highly impressive. Phase leaders also play a pivotal role within the highly effective structure. Staff speak warmly of the support given by leaders and managers, particularly in improving the curriculum and teaching and learning. There is a strong sense of corporate spirit and purpose across the whole staff body; the positive ethos developed in such a short space of time is striking.

Development planning is strong and monitoring is very rigorous, with identified actions for improvement always followed up. All staff have embraced challenging teaching and progress targets as part of performance management. Leaders and managers are skilled in observing teaching and the senior team, consequently, has an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for further development through thorough self-evaluation. The school has already met almost all of the demanding targets set through the post-inspection action plan, well ahead of schedule. Subject leaders are now being developed within this team. They already have a good understanding of literacy and numeracy across the school and there is, consequently, a strong sense of continuity and progression for staff in core subjects. Good progress has also been made in cross-curricular initiatives and the development of an exciting and creative wider curriculum.

Members of the governing body are now gathering substantial information about the school first-hand, through visits and reports. Minutes of meetings and written reports show that they are offering a strong challenge to the school to improve still further. They monitor the 'milestones' for improvement independently of the senior leaders so that they can be assured that targets are being met. Parents and carers are much more engaged with the school, as seen in good attendance at workshops on problem-solving in mathematics.

The strengths in leadership and management and teaching and learning apply equally well to Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The impressive improvements seen in provision and teaching and learning have been successfully embedded since the last inspection visit. The Early Years manager leads

the area very well on a day-to-day basis, ably supported in strategic development by an assistant headteacher. The curriculum is highly engaging and sophisticated, well adapted and fine-tuned to the needs of pupils, particularly boys. Children are now confidently shaping letters, and early phonics work is a daily feature of teacher-led activity. There is a very good balance of this style of working with child-initiated learning, with a good range of activities ensuring success in all areas of learning. Teacher assessments show that this improved provision is having a very positive impact on children's progress, which is much better than it had been previously.

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

- increase the effectiveness of leadership and management – outstanding
- improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage – good.

External support

The National Leader in Education (NLE) has played an important role in supporting leadership development, and the partner school in developing teaching and learning. The local authority, working with these partners, has continued to support the school, but more at arms' length. This is because the school has demonstrated a greatly increased capacity to sustain its own development and progress. The school has met nearly all of the demanding targets set by the local authority in its Ofsted action plan following the last inspection and is making at least good progress against all the key areas for improvement.

The remaining challenge is for the school to further embed the impressive improvements to provision and to sustain current accelerated rates of progress for pupils. It also needs to ensure that teachers who have been more recently recruited to the school are enabled to play as effective a part as their colleagues in its continuing improvement.