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9 March 2012

Mrs E Tayler
Headteacher
Cottingham Church of England School
Berryfield Road
Market Harborough
LE16 8XB

Dear Mrs Tayler

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Cottingham Church of England School

Following my visit to your school on 7–8 March 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed only after consultation with HMI.

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 Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment in writing, mathematics and science across the school by ensuring that teachers use assessment information to plan learning that matches pupils' different abilities, especially in providing challenge for more-able pupils.
- Raise the quality of teaching to at least satisfactory by ensuring teachers:
 - identify precise learning objectives and success criteria and share these with pupils so that they and their parents know clearly how well they are doing and how to improve
 - adjust teaching methods and curriculum activities so that they systematically build pupils' learning and skills.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of subject leadership and the Early Years Foundation Stage so that rigorous checks of pupils' achievement and progress lead to actions that result in improvements to teaching and the curriculum.

Special measures: monitoring of Cottingham Church of England School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 7–8 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, subject leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair and two members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

An experienced teacher joined the school in February 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is improving. The headteacher has developed an effective system for monitoring pupils' progress. She uses this to review how each individual is performing, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's most recent assessment information indicates improvement since the last monitoring visit. Year 6 pupils are on track to meet or exceed the national expectations for Level 4 in English and mathematics. However, currently fewer are expected to achieve Level 5 in mathematics than in English. In other year groups, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with that expected for pupils' ages, especially in reading. However, in each year, one of either writing or mathematics remains below national expectations and requires improvement. The pattern varies between years. Senior staff recognise these areas for improvement and have taken prompt action to introduce new approaches to strengthen learning. Pupils are due to be assessed in science during a programme of themed activities later this term.

The school's assessment information shows that pupils are mostly making progress that is in line with that expected nationally. However, as with attainment, in each year group pupils make slower progress in either writing or mathematics. This slower progress currently prevents pupils from reaching the levels expected for their age. Staff monitor closely the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Overall, they make similar progress to their peers because of the increasingly wide range of support and interventions provided by the school.

Pupils mostly concentrate well in lessons and show interest in their learning. They work together well. They enjoy practical tasks, for example measuring volumes of water in a range of containers in a mathematics lesson to secure understanding of different units. Some pupils make extended contributions to discussion or give detailed answers to teachers' questions. However, in some classes, pupils lack confidence orally and this often prevents them from showing teachers what they have learnt.

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

- raise attainment in writing, mathematics and science across the school – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Over half of the teaching observed on this visit was good, an increase since November. As a result, more pupils make good progress in lessons but this is not sufficient to ensure that they close the gap with national expectations in writing and mathematics in all classes. Teachers now plan lessons more effectively to match work to pupils' differing abilities. Teachers set clear objectives for learning and often link these directly to the levels pupils are expected to achieve. Pupils do not usually all complete the same task and, sometimes they start independent or group work at different times. In the best planning, the teacher makes explicit what each pupil will be expected to learn in the lesson.

The headteacher and staff have responded to the slower pupil progress in writing and mathematics by introducing specific new approaches. In writing, teachers now focus more explicitly on making their expectations clear for pupils and providing them with criteria by which they can judge whether they have been successful. In mathematics, teachers now test pupils' mental arithmetic regularly to identify any particular weaknesses so that they can teach these skills directly. Both these approaches are improving pupils' confidence, although it is too early to judge their impact on achievement.

Teachers' use of assessment to check pupils' understanding has improved. Pupils are now clearer about what they have to do next. The school policy on marking pupils' work is well established and teachers use it consistently across the school. In the best examples, the teacher makes very clear what the pupil has achieved and what they need to concentrate on next to make their work better. In a Year 3 writing lesson, pupils used the teachers' comments from the previous lesson and their success criteria to edit their information texts and successfully improve the quality of their work. Teachers now use a wider range of questions in class discussion and with small groups to ensure that pupils understand the main aspects of the lesson. They challenge pupils, including those who have special educational needs, to explain their ideas or to expand on them. Teaching assistants provide generally effective support for pupils and assist them to understand what they have to do. However, the quality of support varies across classes.

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

- raise the quality of teaching to at least satisfactory – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons. The few occasions where pupils do not follow instructions are because they do not listen carefully enough rather than due to a lack of cooperation. Pupils move around the school calmly and treat each other with respect. Older pupils provide support for younger ones as playground 'buddies'. Pupils work together well in pairs and small groups. Their attendance, at over 96%, is well above average. The school ensures that it fulfils the requirements for keeping pupils safe. Pupils behave sensibly when completing practical tasks such as in science and physical education.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to set a clear vision for the school, strongly focused on improving teaching and raising achievement. Increasingly, staff share an understanding of the main areas for improvement and how to move the school forward. This is demonstrated in the improvements in teaching and assessment since the last visit. The headteacher has established an effective system for reviewing teachers' lessons to help them understand exactly what they need to do to improve, leading to precise and helpful action plans. The headteacher uses her analysis from the system for monitoring progress to inform meetings with teachers which focus on how each individual pupil is performing. These meetings now lead to increasingly effective strategies for those who are not making the progress expected of them. The headteacher has a good understanding of what is improving in the school and those areas which need development. She compiles relevant action plans and evaluates regularly whether they have had impact.

Subject leaders now have a clear understanding of their role and take accountability for outcomes in their areas of responsibility. They monitor provision more regularly and are beginning to use the information from their monitoring to adjust action plans and set new priorities including, for example, the introduction of the mental arithmetic programme. Subject leaders and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader meet members of the governing body to discuss their work but do not report formally on the progress made. The curriculum is improving, as demonstrated by the better small-group reading sessions supported by an attractive and improved range of fiction and non-fiction texts. Pupils are due to benefit from extended science projects later this term, designed to give them the time to work through different stages of problem solving and scientific processes.

The governing body has increased the frequency of direct discussions with subject leaders and senior staff to review progress on the main areas of priority. As a result, members are increasingly well informed about what the school is doing and they are beginning to assess for themselves the impact of activities. They hold regular meetings for parents and carers to find out their views and answer any queries.

They have set up a working group to research strategic options for the school's future.

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

- strengthen the effectiveness of subject leadership and the Early Years Foundation Stage – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support for the school. Local authority staff contribute to the specific evaluation of areas of the school's work. They provide useful support and training for individual teachers. The link with a successful local school has enabled staff to see good practice, share approaches to planning and improving learning, and provided opportunities for them to observe lessons in a different context. Effective training by an expert teacher has improved approaches to small-group work in reading. As a result, teaching has improved since the last visit.