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8 February 2013

Miss J Warnock
Headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
St John's Place
Canterbury
CT1 1BD

Dear Miss Warnock

No formal designation monitoring inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school with Christine Raeside HMI on 6–7 February 2013, 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 a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, specialist teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and three representatives of the local authority. Joint observations of lessons were conducted with senior leaders.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

The school opened in September 2012 following the amalgamation of Kingsmead Primary School and Diocesan and Payne Smith Primary School. The school operates on both sites of the predecessor schools. There are 338 pupils on the school roll. Around one in six of the pupils come from minority ethnic groups and one in seven pupils speaks English as an additional language. Almost half the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and around one in ten come from families with a parent serving in the armed forces. Around one quarter of pupils are disabled or

have special educational needs, including six who have statements of special educational needs. Pupil mobility is high. Three new teachers were appointed in January 2013.

Delays in building work and the refurbishment of existing buildings have prevented the school from operating from a single site. This has resulted in an additional financial burden in running two sites and has been a barrier to developing the identity of the school as a single community. It also imposes additional challenges for senior leaders in monitoring the work of the school closely and impacts adversely on pupils' learning.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are significantly below the expectation for their ages. An increasing proportion of pupils have social, emotional and behavioural problems or speech and language difficulties. Observation of pupils' work shows that attainment is below average, particularly in reading and writing. The school's most recent performance data show pupils are making expected progress in mathematics but that progress is slow in reading and writing in some year groups. The school now has an accurate baseline from which future progress can be judged. There are encouraging signs but it is too early to say if the school's actions are having a positive impact on narrowing gaps and raising standards in reading and writing.

The quality of teaching

The school judges that teaching requires improvement and inspection evidence supports this view. Where teaching is good, teachers understand how children learn and lessons are structured to ensure pupils have tasks and activities that are suited to their needs and prior learning. Pupils in these lessons enjoy the challenging and exciting activities and they have good opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. Some of the better lessons promote pupils' learning by requiring them to check and correct their own work.

In the lessons that require improvement in order to be good, work is not matched well enough to the needs of the different groups of pupils, and there are too few opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning so that they can deepen their understanding. In these lessons, teachers do not systematically test pupils' understanding before moving on and the pace of lessons is undemanding. Although most pupils' books are marked regularly, the quality of advice pupils are given, through the written comments provided by teachers, is too variable and does not always aid improvement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school is a generally calm and orderly environment for learning. There is a strong focus on developing kindness and respect for others and developing the skills needed to be good learners. The school has worked hard to support and challenge pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. New lunchtime arrangements have had a positive impact on improving behaviour, during this less structured part of the day, and have improved pupils' social interaction. Some pupils struggled initially with the two schools being brought together, particularly those in Years 5 and 6. However, changes to the organisation of classes and recruitment of experienced teachers in January 2013 have resolved many of the issues. Attendance is improving but there are still too many pupils who do not attend regularly and this has a negative impact on their learning and development.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and new governing body have developed a staffing structure which is based on shared leadership. They have been successful in developing a cohesive staff who share common aspirations for the school. The school recognises that the leadership team is relatively inexperienced but rapid progress is being made in making all leaders more effective in their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. They pay close attention to the quality of teaching and learning and use lesson observations to identify staff development needs and to promote improvement. The school improvement plan has sensible priorities and is informed by accurate monitoring of the school's work and feedback from staff and parents. The plan includes appropriate actions and has sensible timescales and success criteria for judging progress. However, the plan does not make clear how some initiatives will be monitored or how and when the governing body will check that the school's actions are making a difference to improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. There is a monitoring group composed of representatives from the school, governing body and local authority which looks closely at the work of the school on a termly basis.

The school is working hard to involve parents more actively in their children's learning. For example, during the visit parents were invited to attend a rhyme/singing time event.

External support

The school is working closely with the local authority and other partners to develop various aspects of the school's work, including leadership, the use of assessment and quality of teaching. The school is also working in partnership with a group of

local schools to share expertise. This provides teachers with an opportunity to visit other schools to observe best practice and improve their teaching.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on improvements to teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in reading and writing.
- Support and challenge less experienced leaders to ensure that they are effective in driving improvement. Ensure that new systems and procedures are embedded and implemented consistently by all staff.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Canterbury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector