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Samantha Price
St Peter's CofE (C) Primary School
Reservoir Road
Hednesford
Cannock
WS12 1BE

Dear Miss Price

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Peter's CofE (C) Primary School

Following my visit with Nigel Boyd, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5–6 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2012. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers should not be appointed without prior discussion with the monitoring HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012

- Improve teaching and accelerate the progress made by pupils in order to raise their attainment by:
 - ensuring that there is a systematic approach to teaching skills in writing and mathematics, and providing opportunities for pupils to use and apply these skills across the curriculum
 - sharing current good and outstanding practice regarding the expectations of pupils, and the pace at which they should progress
 - ensuring that teachers' marking provides pupils with consistently good guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, and that pupils are given opportunities to respond to teachers' advice.
- Improve the effectiveness of all leaders in order to secure rapid improvement by:
 - regularly and rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching and using this information to provide a coherent programme of professional development for all staff
 - regularly checking the progress made by all pupils in order to set challenging targets and hold teachers to account for pupils' progress
 - sharpening the skills of leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision so that they are able to support the headteacher effectively with school improvement.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5–6 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and all teachers. In addition, a telephone conversation was held with the Local Leader of Education currently supporting the school. Inspectors also observed all teachers teaching.

Context

The school continues to undergo staffing changes, sometimes unavoidable such as maternity leave, although these are gradually becoming more settled and the use of cover teachers is much reduced. The leadership within school has not changed. These changes to staffing are likely to continue for some time to come.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement continues to improve strongly and is now good in some parts of the school, most notably in the youngest classes and in Key Stage 1. This strong performance is also evident in Year 6. There continues to exist, however, significant variation in the relative performance of pupils and between some groups of pupils. These include the variable progress made by all pupils between Years 3 and 6, but especially lower progress being made by more-able pupils, those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and all pupils, particularly boys, in their writing, especially spelling. In these cases, pupils make less progress than their peers.

The most significant dip in performance is in Years 3 and 4 in both literacy and numeracy.

There are also, however, some strengths. Reading is strong throughout school; children love their books and talk enthusiastically about characters, stories and plots. The children in Year 1, for example, were enthralled by their story and subsequent lion hunt, during which they found a lifelike toy lion unexpectedly hiding in the play tunnel outside.

Standards of writing remain problematic. It is improving but limited in extent and sometimes rather scruffy. Children themselves say they could 'easily write more tidily'. In most classes, pupils now have more time actually writing, but this is inconsistent. The school has implemented a recent initiative 'Talk for Writing' which is helping to improve standards in Key Stage 2. Spelling remains weak and there are few consistent strategies used in school, beyond occasional homework tasks, to tackle this. As a consequence, standards in writing, although improving, remain inadequate. In the youngest classes, pupils make good progress in speaking and

listening and show high levels of concentration and enthusiasm to contribute. This is well developed by adults, who keep them focussed on their language development by asking constant questions.

In mathematics, the use of number names and the ability to count on and count back is secure by end of Year 2. One pupil could happily count backwards from 20 to zero on her space rocket, for example. This knowledge is similar for recognising the use of appropriate measures in Year 2. In one class, pupils were asked to estimate, measure and then compare long strips of coloured paper. They could happily do this and were delighted to find that one strip was as long as the classroom was tall, even though they could not reach that high. However, this confidence is less evident in their number and calculation, especially in Years 3 and 4. This leads to lower attainment and slow progress in these year groups in mathematics and makes the use and application in problem solving more difficult for pupils in Years 5 and 6.

Expectations of what pupils could achieve remain low throughout the school, although this is improving. When asked about their own performance, the pupils say they could do even better, especially in their handwriting. They are right.

The schools own, now accurate, data suggests that a majority of pupils will reach the required standards in both English and mathematics in 2013 despite the variations outlined above. This anticipation rests on accurate data analysis and pupil tracking systems recently implemented, which give cause for optimism.

The quality of teaching

During the inspection, there was much good and some outstanding teaching. This represents a good improvement since the original inspection and is a direct result of hard work by teachers and the increasingly effective monitoring now in place. There are examples of good and outstanding teaching throughout the school but there is also considerable variation. The strongest teaching is for pupils up to Year 2 and for those in the oldest classes. As a result, pupils are making better progress in these year groups than previously. Best practice is beginning to be shared well in the school so that other teachers can learn from it and improve their own skills. Some lessons, particularly in Year 4, are less effective. Activities are designed to improve pupils' skills but not to excite the pupils or to stimulate an enjoyment of the subjects. As a result, progress in Year 4 is not as rapid as in other years in Key Stage 2.

Relationships are very positive. Teachers use praise effectively to encourage pupils and to build up their confidence. They make sure that pupils behave well and pay attention. Staff speak respectfully to pupils when asking them to do something and pupils reciprocate that respect. Most teachers are now asking questions more effectively to help pupils make progress. In particular, questioning is used well to check on pupils' understanding although, in some classes, it still rests on seeking out the right answers rather than checking for understanding. In most lessons, pupils

are given work that matches their ability; they are kept busy working in groups and have plenty of time to discuss problems with each other and the teacher.

Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and point out what they have done well and what could be better. However, pupils are still not getting consistent opportunities to respond to the comments made by teachers in their books and there is an inconsistent use of mini targets to help pupils see what is expected. The marking of spelling is inconsistent. This is a major reason why spelling standards remain stubbornly low. The levelling of pupils' work is still underdeveloped and most pupils are unaware of their targets and the levels at which they are currently working. The presentation of pupils' work is improving and, as a result, they are making fewer careless errors, although written presentation could still be improved.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attitudes to learning are enthusiastic; pupils are engaged and very keen to do well. All pupils want to succeed and the enthusiasm to contribute to sessions is impressive, including one pupil who was delighted to say that 'I knew the question the teacher was going to ask before she asked it – and the answer.' This very positive attitude to learning is evident throughout the school and contributing to improved outcomes.

There is no racism or bullying beyond the occasional playground falling out. This is easily resolved and the pupils themselves say that 'this is a close group of pupils'. It is an inclusive school where pupils look out for each other. Pupils from different backgrounds and heritages are equally included, both in play and lessons, and those with disabilities are well provided for and made part of all activities. Pupils are proud of their school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of leadership is good and continues to improve. The school is driven by an ambitious and energetic headteacher, although she offers more than this. She is diligent about the accuracy of judgements and data and holds those around her to account for the performance of their pupils. She has secured the confidence of the school community and, importantly, the pupils, who appreciate her commitment to them and their school. She is supported by an increasingly robust wider leadership team.

The leadership team now has increased capacity due to the contribution of all to the monitoring of work in their respective areas. In English, for example, there has been a suitable range of initiatives implemented recently, with emerging evidence that this is improving standards of writing. This includes coaching of colleagues in literacy and mentoring, work scrutiny and contribution to governing body meetings. A particular strength is the regular and planned scrutiny of teachers' planning and marking.

The deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator contribute to this by effective monitoring of their subjects and overall school management, although the analysis of pupils' performance is less detailed and not yet used to help develop the school improvement plan. This remains broad and lacks specific targets as a result of imprecise contributions by some leaders. The bulk of the improvement work still rests on the headteacher and governors, although all are now contributing by, for example, the development of a new calculation policy linked to a forthcoming parents' evening to explain it.

There is a significant contribution by governors to school improvement. This includes appointing subject link governors and holding regular meetings in which there is now challenging debate. Simple things have helped. This includes, for example, sending governors' data in advance with a commentary to digest which allows them to ask more challenging questions. This they now do. The Chair of the Governing Body brings expertise from beyond education to the debate and instils a sense of ambition and forward thinking.

There are some limitations to the depth and quality of school improvement planning. Although the planned actions are appropriate, they lack hard-edged targets for school performance. They are not yet fully based on the results of the enhanced monitoring and the findings that emerge from this.

External support

There is strong support by the Local Leader of Education who assists the school and is an experienced headteacher from a nearby school. There is support also from the diocese. Advice from subject consultants from the local authority is very useful but unavoidable changes have disrupted regular contact from the authority and, as a consequence, the overall impact of this advice is mixed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Introduce targets in each class, so that pupils know what is expected of them, and at whole-school level in school improvement planning.