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Mrs Katie Tomlinson

Associate Headteacher

Accrington St John with St Augustine Church of England Primary School

Maudsley Street

Accrington

Lancashire

BB5 6AD

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Accrington St John with St Augustine Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 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 June 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 may not be appointed.

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 Executive Director for Children and Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics for all pupils by:
 - increasing the proportion of consistently good or better teaching
 - increasing and improving the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) and of reading
 - taking prompt action to support pupils who are not making good progress
 - setting higher expectations for pupils' behaviour and more effective rewards so that good behaviour enhances learning in lessons
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate so that suitably challenging targets can be set, especially for higher-attaining pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - improving the quality of teachers' professional development with a focus on increasing rates of pupils' progress in lessons through fast-paced, challenging learning activities
 - sharing existing good practice in the school
 - raising expectations so that all teachers have equally high expectations of the progress that pupils should make.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, and increase the capacity to improve by:
 - ensuring that the results of regular and rigorous monitoring are used to bring about further improvement
 - robustly and accurately evaluating the school's performance and the impact of actions to raise standards
 - raising expectations regarding the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make and holding teachers to account more effectively
 - improving the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all groups of pupils and contributes to their good and better progress
 - sharing data on pupils' progress and attainment regularly with the governing body so that members are more effective in rigorously holding the school to account
 - providing more opportunities for middle leaders to train and monitor staff in the areas for which they are responsible.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 March 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. She observed teaching in all but one class and sampled pupils' work in all classes.

Context

There have been no further staffing changes since the last monitoring inspection. One teacher was absent during the inspection. Governors have advertised for a substantive headteacher to take up post in September 2013. The vice-chair has taken over as Chair of the Governing Body and two new governors have been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

This inspection focused on the rate of pupils' learning in lessons and their progress in writing and mathematics since September. Children are getting off to a more rapid start in the Reception class due to better teaching and a range of interesting activities that help them develop their skills. A new approach to lesson planning has been introduced in Years 1 to 6, which aims to make sure pupils of different ability are set work that challenges them. This is proving particularly effective for pupils of higher and middle ability; they are now making better progress because teachers expect more of them. Pupils who have special educational needs now have individual plans that are more sharply focused on what they need to learn next. However, some pupils of lower ability do not always make the progress they are capable of because they are not fully involved in whole-class teaching.

During this monitoring inspection pupils' writing and mathematics books were checked in every class. Pupils are more productive and their progress has quickened recently. The standard of pupils' writing and their work in mathematics are getting closer to age-related expectations. Pupils have a good grasp of the features of different types of writing and their vocabulary develops well. However, handwriting, spelling and punctuation have not been given enough attention in the past, so pupils have not developed a speedy and fluent style. These aspects are a focus for whole-school improvement. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is rising because activities are less likely to repeat what pupils already know and can do.

The quality of teaching

Teaching shows improvement since the last monitoring visit. No inadequate lessons were seen. The revised approach to lesson planning is helping teachers introduce new knowledge at a faster rate and develop pupils' skills for independent learning.

Teaching is at its best where teachers have strong subject knowledge and convey new ideas very clearly. They skilfully question pupils and assess their understanding well. Activities are set at just the right level to keep pupils thinking and learning. Where teaching is weaker, there are missed opportunities to extend pupils' understanding. This happens most often when teachers focus on delivering a set lesson plan but do not respond to pupils' needs as they arise.

Pupils who have gaps in their learning and those with special educational needs are often supported by teaching assistants and sometimes withdrawn from class for specific support to help them catch up. It is too soon to judge whether this approach is proving effective and its impact has yet to be reviewed by school leaders. However, there are occasions when these pupils are not as fully involved in the class teaching before they are withdrawn or when they come back into the lesson.

Assessment and marking have improved considerably. Teachers have a much clearer understanding of the levels pupils are working at. Marking is consistent and usually shows pupils what they need to do to improve their work. Where marking is most effective, it identifies the most important next step and shows pupils how to self-correct. However, sometimes too much is corrected by the teacher, so pupils are not sure what the most important point is, particularly in writing.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved. Indoor provision is better organised and children enjoy a range of interesting activities. The outdoor learning area requires further improvement and remains a priority for development. Children's language and literacy skills are promoted particularly well in the Reception class. Children are already developing effective reading behaviours and forming letters correctly for writing.

Phonics teaching (the teaching of letters and the sounds they represent) and guided reading are now embedded in daily routines across the rest of the school and are beginning to raise the standard of pupils' reading and writing. The new approach to teaching calculations is providing more opportunities for pupils to solve problems and is similarly raising standards in this aspect of mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour during lessons is improving. During this inspection, there were no instances of learning being disrupted by behaviour. Although pupils can still occasionally become restless, they quickly respond to direction from the teacher. There is now a consistent approach to managing behaviour in all classes, which pupils fully understand. Teachers are providing pupils with more opportunities to solve problems and write for longer periods of time. This is helping pupils to develop self-reliance and perseverance, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

Pupils are well behaved in shared areas around the school. They say they feel safe and are confident that their teachers will deal with any inappropriate behaviour effectively. The associate headteacher knows the pupils well and is popular with them. Pupils know what is expected of them and appreciate the consistent and fair approach to behaviour management.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The associate headteacher has continued to provide clear and effective leadership to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Systems to improve marking, assessment, behaviour management and lesson planning have become embedded. The comprehensive monitoring programme is ensuring that approaches are consistent from class to class. Feedback from this monitoring clearly identifies improvement points for teachers and whole-school priorities.

The monitoring is still mostly carried out by the associate headteacher and local authority advisers, with some input from the deputy headteacher. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and the English/Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator are beginning to have more active leadership roles. For example, the SENCO is leading meetings with parents and has revised individual education plans for pupils supported at school action plus. The English coordinator has moderated writing assessments, revamped reading resources and observed some phonics teaching. However, there is scope to develop the roles of these and other leaders in checking and driving improvement in their areas of responsibility.

Governors are well informed and are asking challenging questions of school leaders. They realise that pupils' progress needs to be more rapid and know the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They are drafting an action plan to develop the role of individual governors and their monitoring and evaluation responsibilities.

External support

Local authority advisers and consultants have provided effective support for individual staff. They have led whole-school training. The monitoring and intervention team monitor regularly to ensure the school is on track with action plans and that the quality of provision is improving. Support from the Diocesan adviser is equally effective and valued by the school. External support is rightly focusing on building internal capacity and supporting all staff to drive and check improvements in their responsibility areas.