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10 May 2013

Mrs Christine Easton
The Headteacher
St Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School
Island Way West
Chatham
ME4 3ST

Dear Mrs Easton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 and 9 May 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 October 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.

One additional newly qualified teacher may be appointed in Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Medway and the Director of Education for the diocese of Rochester.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and significantly increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers' subject knowledge is good and that training is provided for teachers and teaching assistants to keep them up-to-date, particularly in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics
 - teachers plan lessons that are tailored to meet the different needs and abilities of all pupils
 - teachers keep a close check on the progress of all pupils in lessons, ensuring that they deal with any misunderstanding quickly
 - marking and feedback to pupils are accurate, provide clear guidance about how to improve and identify the next steps in pupils' learning
 - time is provided for pupils to correct their work
 - lessons actively engage and interest all pupils
 - teaching assistants are deployed so that they support the learning of all pupils.
- Improve the achievement of all pupils, ensuring that more pupils reach the higher levels in writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1, and that pupils make at least expected progress in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2, by:
 - agreeing a systematic approach to the teaching of reading and writing, including the use of synthetic phonics (letters and sounds) and monitoring its impact on pupils' spelling
 - making sure teachers use the outcomes of assessments to set challenging and achievable targets for all pupils
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills and knowledge.
- Improve the ability of leaders and the governing body to sustain improvement by ensuring that:
 - provision for pupils, and particularly the quality of teaching, is rigorously monitored and robustly evaluated against the Teachers' Standards and through appraisal and performance management, so that teachers are held to account for pupils' achievement
 - regular and robust analysis of information about pupils' achievement is undertaken to find out how well all groups are making progress, and that plans for improvement are adapted accordingly
 - there is a sharply focused approach to improving teaching and learning through a programme of effective training and the sharing of good practice
 - the newly appointed middle leaders have the knowledge and skills to lead and manage their areas effectively, and are given the responsibility and time to do so

- improvement plans include clear and specific indicators so that success can be easily measured.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 May and 9 May 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and examples of pupils' work and observed 15 lessons, including two joint observations conducted with the headteacher. Discussions were held with the headteacher, subject leaders, staff, a representative from the local authority and four members of the governing body. Conversations were held with pupils. Results of the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were also taken in to account.

Context

Since the previous visit, in January 2013, one new teacher has been appointed and one teacher has left the school. The previous seconded deputy headteacher has also left the school and a different seconded deputy headteacher is now supporting the school three days per week. One teacher has gone on maternity leave and one post is filled by a long-term supply teacher. A new subject leader for English has been appointed and leadership roles and responsibilities have been revised.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Scrutiny of their work and discussions with pupils confirm that their progress has been accelerating, particularly in reading and mathematics, and an increasing proportion is on track to achieve their challenging targets before the end of the school year. Pupils' progress was good or better in around half of the lessons seen. A systematic approach to teaching the sounds that letters make (often known as phonics) is helping pupils with their reading. Pupils were observed applying their phonic skills and knowledge to read unfamiliar words. Where pupils are at risk of falling behind, the school is taking effective steps to provide additional intensive support to help them catch up or overcome difficulties. There is an increasingly strong focus on developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and solving mathematical problems. Achievement gaps between different groups of pupils are closing and those pupils who are having additional help make particularly strong progress. Pupils in Year 5 felt that the mathematics project, which has pupils from Year 5 and Year 3 working together, was helping them to clarify their mathematical thinking.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the last inspection. The school's own information shows a significant improvement in the quality of teaching over time and inspection evidence confirms improvements to the school's previous profile of teaching. The majority of the teaching seen during the inspection was increasingly effective, some teaching requires further improvement in order to be judged good. A few of the well

taught lessons included elements of highly effective practice. Teachers now make better use of what they know about their pupils to plan tasks and activities that meet the needs and abilities of the different groups within each class. However, in some classes this needs to be developed further so that there is a more precise match of tasks to pupils' needs and abilities. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is thorough and provides helpful guidance to show pupils how to improve their work. At the start of each day pupils are given opportunities to look at the marking in their books and make corrections and this is helping them be more aware of exactly what needs to be done to help them reach the next level in their work. In well taught lessons, teachers keep a close eye on pupil progress and modify their plans if pupils are ready to move on or have not understood the task. In a few lessons, lesson introductions are too long, reducing the time pupils have to collaborate in groups or work on individual tasks. In addition, teachers do not check what pupils are doing often enough, particularly when they are engaged in independent work, so time is wasted when pupils get stuck or have misunderstood what they are expected to do.

Classrooms and outside areas provide attractive environments for learning and celebrate pupils' achievements. Teachers do not routinely take advantage of the rich resources displayed on the classroom walls and opportunities are missed to get pupils to use these resources to support their learning. Training provided for teachers in problem solving in mathematics, using letters and sounds, guided reading and supporting improvements to spelling are having a positive impact on teachers' practice and this has enabled pupils to make faster progress in these particular areas of their learning. Teaching assistants are used well to support and challenge pupils in group work, but they are sometimes underused in whole-class activities that are led by the teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils and parents say that the good behaviour and positive attitudes observed at the time of the last visit and again on this visit are typical. Pupils generally behave well and are polite. They mostly require little more than gentle prompting to adhere to the school's high expectations of how they should behave. Pupils speak confidently and positively about their school and are comfortable speaking to visitors. Most pupils attend school regularly and current attendance is high. Pupils say that they enjoy school and this is evident in their engagement in lessons and the good relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of teaching and learning is checked robustly. All teachers are being held to account for improving pupils' progress. Middle leaders are being developed so that they can play a more active role in checking improvements in their areas of responsibility. They have already been involved in scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' work and shortly will be trained so that they can undertake lesson

observations. Teachers have been given opportunities to observe good practice in other classes and some have accompanied senior staff to observe good or outstanding practice in other schools. This has helped raise expectations and enabled teachers to begin to address their own individual areas for development. The school reviews pupils' learning six times a year. Judgements on pupils' attainment are checked with other schools and with local authority representatives to ensure the school has an accurate baseline from which to measure future progress. Senior leaders conduct a thorough analysis of how well pupils make progress to know how well pupils are doing. Where pupils are underperforming, or at risk of underperforming, extra one-to-one or small-group support is provided to help them catch up.

A group of governors monitors progress against the school's action plan closely. In addition to considering information provided by the school, governors visit the school and participate in activities to check on progress, including conversations with pupils to discuss their work. Although they have a clear picture of the impact of the individual initiatives that are being used to raise attainment and improve teaching, there is no overall evaluation of progress against the specific indicators and milestones that are included in the school's improvement plan.

External support

The local authority has continued to broker support for the school and local authority officers have conducted a review of performance to test the school's own self-evaluation. Advisers and advanced skills teachers have worked with individual teachers and with subject leaders to promote improvements to teaching. The impact of this work can be seen in the rising attainment of pupils, but the local authority and senior leaders recognise there are still some weaknesses to remedy in teaching.