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4 October 2013

Mr Adam Laskey
Headteacher
East Crompton St James CofE Primary School
St James Street
Shaw
Oldham
Lancashire
OL2 7TD

Dear Mr Laskey

Special measures monitoring inspection of East Crompton St James CofE Primary School

Following my visit with Stephen Rowland, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 October 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.

This visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013. 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

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Manchester, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Adults and Children's Services for Oldham.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that it is good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of their pupils and what they can achieve in lessons
 - take proper account of pupils' abilities and what pupils already know, understand and can do when planning lessons
 - set work that is at the right level and challenges everyone
 - give pupils more opportunities to actively participate in lessons so that they share and develop their ideas fully
 - make what is taught sufficiently interesting to stimulate pupils' interest and maintain their attention.

- Improve achievement by challenging and supporting all pupils appropriately by:
 - providing more engaging and creative opportunities for pupils to write, particularly at length
 - improving how well pupils with special educational needs are taught, setting suitably challenging work and checking progress regularly.

- Urgently address weaknesses in safeguarding procedures by ensuring:
 - the safeguarding policy and its related policies are regularly reviewed and updated
 - new staff receive safeguarding training promptly
 - all risk assessments are complete and routinely updated
 - any records of incidents relating to pupils' safety and well-being are recorded clearly and updated where necessary.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance in securing improvement by:
 - making sure all subject leaders plan for and evaluate their subjects fully
 - ensuring that the school's leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching thoroughly and identify the steps that need to be taken to lead to improvement
 - implementing a rigorous programme to manage the performance of teachers
 - ensuring that leaders evaluate the school's performance accurately and draw up plans of subsequent action that are sharply focused on areas of weakness
 - improving the governing body's skills and knowledge so it can hold school leaders to account and provide robust challenge when evaluating the school's work.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 October 2013.

Evidence

During our visit my colleague inspector and I observed the school's work. Meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the group of teachers who have management responsibility for literacy, numeracy, the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Meetings were also held with a group of class teachers, the special educational needs coordinator, a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Manchester and three members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). The Chair of the IEB is also a representative of the local authority. We scrutinised a number of documents including the school's revised development plan, the latest pupil progress data and the school's single central record of the checks carried out on staff to ensure that they are suitably qualified to work with children. We also met with groups of pupils from Years 3, 5 and 6, analysed the work in their books and observed 13 part lessons, some jointly with you. We also took the opportunity to observe the pupils as they moved around the school and we observed how they related to each other at break and lunchtime.

Context

Since my previous visit the IEB has managed to secure your services as executive headteacher until at least the end of this academic year. Three permanent staff are unavoidably absent from school and their commitments are being covered, effectively, by temporary teachers. The IEB is currently in discussions with representatives from the Department for Education, the Church of England Diocese of Manchester and the local authority about the range of options open to it for establishing the future arrangements for the status, senior leadership and governance of the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The 2013 data for Key Stage 1 show that the previous downward trend in attainment in reading and writing has been reversed. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 2 in both subjects increased compared to the previous year. As a result, pupils' attainment is above both national and local authority averages. This improvement would tend to suggest that the work that you have done to improve the teaching of literacy and, in particular, writing has had a positive impact on performance. Although all pupils at the end of Year 2 attained at least a Level 2 in mathematics in 2013, the proportion of those pupils who attained at the higher levels declined. This implies that more-able pupils underachieved.

The Key Stage 1 progress data for 2013 show that both boys and girls made more than expected progress in reading. In writing, girls' progress exceeded that of the boys putting them about one term ahead of the boys as they entered Key Stage 2. However, this gap is narrower than that found nationally. In mathematics, boys' progress was comparable with that of the girls and there was no significant difference in achievement between the two groups.

Achievement in reading of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals was equal to that of their peers. In mathematics, the gap in achievement between the two groups was narrower than that found nationally. However, in writing, pupils entitled to free school meals were about one third of a National Curriculum level behind their peers as they entered Year 3 in September.

Pupils left St James' at the end of Year 6 in 2013 having attained broadly similar results in national tests to their peers nationwide. Consequently, most pupils reached at least Level 4 in English, reading, writing and mathematics. However, in writing, one third of the cohort attained at the higher Level 5 compared to 13% in 2012. As with the improvements in writing at Key Stage 1 this would provide further evidence to suggest the positive impact of your drive to improve literacy. However, in mathematics, attainment at the higher levels declined. Your evaluation suggests that this fall in attainment was a consequence of the turbulence in staffing in Year 6 that occurred just after the inspection. In addition, you believe teacher assessment of mathematics was not accurate. Consequently, underperforming pupils, particularly those of higher ability, were not identified quickly enough for their teachers to provide effective support to get them back on track.

Senior leaders have now taken effective steps to ensure that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment is reliable. They have also introduced rigorous and regular tracking of pupils' progress against challenging targets. This enables teachers to identify swiftly those pupils who are underachieving and provide appropriate support to make sure these pupils do not fall behind. Pupils with special educational needs are subject to the same level of scrutiny by the special educational needs coordinator. Consequently, these pupils are making progress in line with that of their peers.

The quality of teaching

Teaching that is at least consistently good in all key stages is at the heart of your vision for improving the school. In order to try and achieve this staff are implementing a new teaching and learning policy. This establishes clear expectations for the way lessons should be planned and taught and also the way pupils' work should be marked. Lessons are now planned to a consistent format, ensuring that learning activities are well organised and appropriately sequenced. Learning objectives, expressed as a series of learning challenges, are shared with the pupils at the start of each lesson. This enables teachers to check pupils' understanding periodically against these objectives and at the same time gives pupils the opportunity to assess the progress they are making. This new way of working was clearly illustrated in one excellent lesson for children in the Reception Year. In this well organised learning activity the teacher allowed the children to explore ideas about autumn through the medium of dance. This challenged them to represent their thoughts using movement; making them think, fuelling their creativity and enabling them to make outstanding progress.

The literacy consultant is having a positive impact on the way that writing is taught across the school. For example, in one very effective Year 3 lesson pupils were learning about Greek mythology. The lesson started at a brisk pace and a short animation giving information about Greek gods captured the children's interest. Then, using a range of resources pupils worked individually or in groups to find out about one of these gods and present their research in the form of a fact file. The reason the lesson was so successful was

because the teacher had carefully selected activities that fired the enthusiasm of the children, met their needs and gave purpose to their writing.

The work seen in a sample of books from pupils in Years 3 and 5 shows that the quality of pupils' writing is improving. Pupils are now being given more opportunities to write creatively and at length. Consequently, standards of achievement in writing continue to rise at both key stages.

Pupils' achievement in mathematics is also improving but the rate of improvement does not match that seen in literacy. Although inspectors observed good quality mathematics teaching in Years' 5 and 6 work in the pupils' books suggests that some activities are not always well matched to need. Consequently, some tasks lack challenge for higher attainers. Conversely, there are also examples where the work that the pupils are given in lessons is too difficult. For example, in one lower Key Stage 2 class pupils had been given problems to solve involving the subtraction of one two-digit number from another. Lower-attaining pupils found this work too hard because some of their basic skills in number were underdeveloped. Consequently, this limited their progress.

With the support of the mathematics consultant you have introduced a new calculation policy. The intention is that this policy will provide a consistent approach to the way pupils are taught addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Work involving problem solving is also becoming a feature of mathematics lessons; enabling pupils to see how mathematics applies to the real world. Inspectors witnessed examples of pupils' tenacity when presented with these problems and their refusal to give up until they had solved them.

Teachers mark pupils' books regularly and written comments are supportive and encouraging. However, there are still some comments that are not specific enough. For example, one comment 'improve your handwriting' is too general and does not give enough information about what the pupil needs to do to make their writing better. In addition, where teachers have suggested improvements these are not always followed up. Consequently, opportunities for pupils to learn from their mistakes are missed.

Almost all pupils interviewed by inspectors said that lessons have improved since the inspection. When asked why, the most popular response given by pupils was that they felt teachers were making the work more challenging.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Concerns raised at the previous full inspection about safeguarding have been tackled. Safer recruitment procedures are in place and employment checks to determine the suitability of adults to work with children meet statutory requirements. Policies relating to the management of behaviour and ensuring that pupils are well cared for have been agreed, with clear lines of responsibility. Issues relating to the recording of incidents concerning pupils' behaviour, identified at my last visit, have been addressed. Each class in school now has its own incident log with each class teacher responsible for ensuring that it is kept up to date.

As at the previous full inspection pupils' behaviour is good. Their relationships with each other and the adults who work with them both in and out of class are warm and productive.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since my previous visit and ably supported by the deputy headteacher you have been relentless in your drive to improve the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have recently introduced an effective system of performance management. Consequently, teachers are now held robustly to account for their work and the standards achieved by pupils.

Inspection evidence supports your evaluation that there is no longer any inadequate teaching in the school. However, some teachers are still providing a 'one size fits all' approach to the teaching of mathematics and topic work in Key Stage 2. As a result, some of the activities pupils are given to do are too hard for the lower attainers and too easy for the more-able. Consequently, the progress of both groups is not as rapid as it could be. As a result, some teaching at Key Stage 2 still requires improvement.

The involvement of the subject leaders responsible for the Early Years Foundation Stage, literacy and mathematics in monitoring and evaluation is underdeveloped. There have been limited opportunities made available to them to assess the quality of the teaching in their subject areas. Also, they are not involved in the routine monitoring of pupils' progress. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation rely too heavily on senior leaders. As a result, opportunities for developing the management expertise of subject leaders and involving them in the strategic leadership of the school are missed.

Members of the IEB are regular visitors to St James'; consequently, they have a realistic view of the progress the school is making on its journey of improvement. The IEB provides effective challenge and support to the senior leadership enabling it to maintain a vigorous pace of change. The IEB meets fortnightly in order to evaluate the steps being taken to meet the improvement priorities in the post Ofsted action plan. This enables the IEB to hold senior leaders robustly to account for the progress being made towards the removal of special measures.

External support

The local authority is working effectively with senior leaders in their drive to improve the school. One of the local authority's School Improvement Consultants is the Chair of the IEB and brings her considerable experience to bear on the work of the group. The local authority has enabled the school to employ independent consultants to work with staff to develop their expertise in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). As a consequence, standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy are improving and teachers are making more effective use of ICT in the classroom. The partnership brokered between your own school and St James' continues to be effective in enabling the staff from both establishments to share good practice.