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14 October 2013

Jon Fox
Headteacher
Reculver Church of England Primary School
Hillborough
Herne Bay
CT6 6TA

Dear Mr Fox

Special measures monitoring inspection of Reculver Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Lisa Moore, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury.

Yours sincerely
Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in Years 1, 5 and 6, by:
 - using accurate information about what pupils know and understand to plan lessons which meet the needs of all
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and mathematical skills in other subjects
 - giving better feedback in marking which shows pupils how they can improve their work
 - making learning more fun and exciting so that pupils, particularly boys, are more interested and make faster progress in reading and writing
 - making sure that teaching assistants are always clear about what is expected of them in every lesson.
- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
 - regularly offering more opportunities for pupils to solve problems and apply their skills in mathematics lessons
 - making sure that pupils are taught how to write neatly and accurately using correct spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write for sustained periods of time and for a greater variety of purposes
 - making sure that pupils in Key Stage 1 make faster progress in reading by helping them to learn their letters and the sounds they make.
- Improve behaviour so that in all lessons pupils work well on their own and do not lose concentration and distract others.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - providing training for leaders at all levels so that they are more accurate in judging the quality of learning and teaching
 - checking more often and more rigorously on the quality of teaching so teachers know what they need to do to improve and how quickly
 - developing leaders' use of assessment information to set targets for teachers which have a sharp focus on making sure that pupils catch up more quickly
 - regularly checking on pupils' progress to identify those who are falling behind and providing support to enable them to catch up
 - making sure that all pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding are provided with appropriate support
 - improving the systems for planning for the future so plans are clear, have specific outcomes and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - developing the skills and knowledge of the governing body so governors understand better how well the school is doing, can support appropriately and regularly challenge it to improve.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the seconded deputy headteacher and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. Meetings were held with other school staff, including those responsible for leading mathematics and English, a group of class teachers and the member of staff who leads support for pupils known to be in receipt of pupil premium funding. Meetings were also held with a representative from the local authority, a representative from the parent council and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed nine lessons and 18 parts of lessons throughout the school. Around half of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. On this monitoring visit, the school improvement plan and related action planning documents were not checked.

Context

The deputy headteacher has been absent for the majority of time since the previous monitoring inspection. An experienced school leader was seconded to Reculver Primary School during the summer term of 2013. He has since returned to his own school. Another highly experienced school leader joined the school as a seconded deputy headteacher in September 2013. It has been agreed that she will remain at Reculver for at least the duration of this academic year.

Not all classes in Key Stage 2 are permanently staffed. A recruitment process is underway to address this.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievements at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2013 showed no significant improvement on the results of the previous year. Pupils who left the school in July 2013 made too little progress as a result of weak teaching over time and gaps in their knowledge were not successfully addressed. Test results for reading and mathematics fell below the levels expected for pupils of this age. While more pupils reached the expected levels in writing, very few achieved the higher levels. Boys typically achieved less well than girls. Those entitled to free school meals achieved less well than their peers, although this gap was reduced on the previous year.

In 2013, at the end of Key Stage 1, too few pupils reached the expected levels for their age in English. Over one third of pupils in Year 2 did not reach the expected levels in reading and even fewer reached expected levels in writing. While a greater proportion of pupils achieved the expected standards in mathematics, in all subjects the school's results were below the national averages.

School leaders and the interim executive board accept that these results are not good enough. School data and pupils' workbooks demonstrate that this weak profile of attainment and progress was not universal throughout the school. For example, the phonics screening check carried out on Year 1 pupils in 2013 showed a major improvement on the previous year, with the majority of pupils reaching skills of at least expected levels. During this monitoring inspection, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils throughout Key Stage 1 were observed to be making particularly strong progress in developing their knowledge of letters and sounds and in their overall reading and writing skills. In Key Stage 1, pupils are divided into small groups according to their reading levels. Every day, lessons in these small groups are precisely tailored to the pupils' next steps in learning and activities are structured to include speaking, reading, spelling and writing.

Over time, pupils' rates of progress have been too variable from class to class and too slow overall. This picture is changing. Comprehensive information is enabling senior staff to make more regular and precise checks on individual pupils' attainment and to intervene when necessary to ensure pupils do not fall behind. New initiatives, including training and support for teachers and revised policies and practices, as well as some changes in teaching staff, have resulted in children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils in Key Stage 1 and some pupils in Key Stage 2 making a very positive start to this academic year. Observations during this inspection confirmed the school's view that teaching and resulting rates of progress are good in Key Stage 1 and in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Rates of progress remain uneven in Key Stage 2.

There is a greater emphasis than previously on raising standards of handwriting, spelling and use of grammar. For example, in one Year 6 class, pupils were observed accurately describing and employing correct grammatical terminology, such as similes and rhetorical questions. However, in another Key Stage 2 class, one pupil was observed practising spellings that had been copied inaccurately. In Year 2, pupils have frequent opportunities to write in depth for different purposes; they take pride in their cursive handwriting and concentrate well on their given tasks. This is the case in many, but not all classes.

Achievement in mathematics is improving. The development of 'learning ladders' to identify next steps in learning, a comprehensive handbook for teachers, effective support and a greater emphasis on applying mathematics skills in problem-solving activities are providing a clear framework for improvement.

Pupils currently in Year 2 and Year 6 have gaps in their learning which must be addressed if these pupils are to achieve the standards they should. Data, workbooks and lesson observations confirm that pupils in Year 2 are currently making up for lost ground, but this is not so for all pupils in Year 6.

The quality of teaching

Arising from whole-staff training, as well as focused support for identified teachers, there is now greater consistency in many aspects of teaching. The quality of teaching overall has improved, although significant weaknesses remain in Key Stage 2. More accurate assessment information about what pupils know and can do is used to plan lessons that provide a range of learning tasks and activities suited to pupils' differing needs. Extension activities for high achieving pupils and additional support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are included. Without exception, lessons have specific learning intentions. Clear next steps are carefully identified so that pupils know exactly what they need to do next in order to make maximum progress. The classroom environments have been reorganised to ensure that displays known as 'learning walls' provide pupils with key information and advice about what they are learning, thereby promoting independent learning skills.

The marking of pupils' workbooks has improved very particularly. The school marking policy has been reviewed and its implementation is monitored by senior leaders. Clear, helpful guidance and feedback are usually provided. Subsequently, pupils are clear about how well they have done and precisely what it is they need to practise or improve further. Regular opportunities are given for pupils to respond to the teachers' marking and examples of dialogue about learning were seen in individual pupils' workbooks.

Teachers are enthusiastic and want pupils to enjoy learning. During lesson observations, boys were observed to participate as eagerly as girls in the range of reading and writing activities. More opportunities are being offered for pupils to read, write and employ problem-solving skills in lessons other than English and mathematics. A detailed review of the curriculum is planned to extend these opportunities further.

There is a large teaching assistant workforce. At times, teaching assistants play a vital role in securing the quality of learning. At other times, adults are not well deployed and spend too long listening to the teacher and waiting for an activity to commence before getting involved.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At almost all times during this monitoring inspection, pupils' behaviour, in lessons and at break times, was observed to be good. Pupils chatted politely and confidently to inspectors about their various experiences of school life. Pupils in all year groups reported feeling safe and happy at school. Without exception, pupils like and trust their teachers and express confidence in school staff to help them resolve any worries or concerns. Pupils agree that rules for behaviour are clear, are understood and are applied fairly. This contributes to their sense of safety and trust in adults.

In lessons, pupils' contribution to learning is significant. Not only do they work effectively in pairs or groups to share ideas and reflect upon their learning, the medal-wearing 'leaders of learning' provide peers in need of support with direct guidance and tuition. When taking these roles, pupils are justifiably proud of the genuine contribution they make to learning. On some occasions, typically when teaching is less good, pupils chat or sit passively for too long. At such times, rates of progress are reduced.

Attendance and punctuality to school are monitored closely and a range of rewards is in place to ensure the high profile given to attendance is effectively maintained. Pupils are generally punctual to school, with overall attendance rates in line with those seen nationally.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The determination and ambition of the headteacher, senior leaders, the local authority and the interim executive board to address the areas for improvement are evident. An understanding of the need to improve has permeated the school. Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and to add rigour to the monitoring of pupils' progress are having significant impact. The headteacher and seconded deputy headteacher carry out regular lesson observations, accurately identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching and giving unequivocal feedback to staff. There is a shared and understood system in place for follow-up observations and support wherever teaching is identified as less than good. Within a remarkably short space of time, the seconded deputy headteacher has got to know the school, has won the trust of the staff and is taking a vital role in driving improvement. Systems for setting challenging goals for pupils' achievement and monitoring their progress through regular meetings with class teachers and subject leaders are becoming more robust. Through 'round table' meetings, teachers have gained an enhanced understanding of their own accountability for pupils' progress, including for pupils who need to catch up more quickly with their peers. Additional intervention and support groups are carefully tailored to meet the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. Support for pupils known to be eligible for additional pupil premium funding is highly effective and is enabling these pupils to make faster progress than previously. Direct links between teachers' performance management and pupils' progress are being established. Professional development opportunities for class teachers and key subject leaders are extensive and are widening the responsibility for school improvement. Leadership at all levels is significantly strengthened. Leaders of English and mathematics are clear about what still needs to improve and are becoming increasingly adept at understanding and responding to data. They are not yet involved in judging the quality of teaching in their subject areas.

The morale amongst teaching staff appears high. Teaching staff and middle leaders express total confidence in the leadership of the school, as did a representative of the parent council. Staff consider that training is enabling them to secure the necessary improvements. A collective sense of optimism and ambition prevails.

Despite this, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 and a small minority that remains inadequate. Some fragility exists as senior staff are aware of the importance of actions translating into better outcomes, particularly for pupils currently in Year 6.

The interim executive board was formalised in June 2013 and is now making a contribution to building a sense of stability and driving improvement. Members of the board bring relevant skills and expertise to their roles. The board meets frequently and knows the school's strengths and weaknesses in increasing detail. In meetings and discussion, greater emphasis is now being placed on pupils' achievements. As a result of requests from the board, the format of the headteacher's report, particularly regarding data, has been altered. The board is fully engaged with proposals to convert to academy status in the year ahead and participates in the local authority's reviews of progress.

External support

As identified at the previous monitoring visit, the local authority provides expert advice and support to the school. Senior leaders, the interim executive board, subject leaders and class teachers have all benefitted from support. Without exception, all school staff report that this guidance is leading to improvements in teaching and leadership. The local authority directs an appropriate level of rigour and challenge towards the school. Progress review meetings are held every six weeks. A teaching and learning adviser provides weekly advice and a local authority representative currently attends interim executive board meetings.