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6 March 2014

Mr Andrew Livingstone
Interim Headteacher
Stansted Church of England Primary School
Malthouse Road
Stansted
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN15 7PH

Dear Mr Livingstone

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stansted Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 and 5 March 2014, 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 July 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 not making enough 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 Diocese of Rochester and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

Improve the quality of teaching so that it is typically good or better through the school by:

- making teachers' explanations shorter and sharper so pupils can get down to work more quickly
- ensuring that those pupils who are capable of harder work start more challenging activities earlier in the lesson
- giving pupils more options in deciding how to complete the tasks set for them
- planning activities in the Reception class that really stretch children, stimulate them to learn without direct adult support and motivate them to persist with an activity.

Improve leadership and management by:

- taking concerted action to ensure the effective long-term leadership and management of the school
- ensuring that senior leaders have the necessary skills needed to drive improvements without the need for significant external support
- ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and subject coordinators are clear, manageable and effective
- making sure that routines to involve staff in monitoring and developing the quality of teaching are implemented as soon as possible
- ensuring that the proposed external review of governance takes place as soon as possible to assess how the governing body can contribute to improving the school's effectiveness.

Improve pupils' achievement, particularly in writing, by:

- ensuring that pupils write longer pieces of work, particularly those who are capable of higher levels
- giving pupils more guidance on how to spell accurately and to write creatively
- making sure that pupils' writing in other subjects is presented more carefully and completed to as high a standard as in English
- providing more opportunities for pupils to use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills within day-to-day activities and other subjects
- ensuring pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 March 2014

Evidence

I observed the school's work including attending an assembly, looking at pupils' books and observing the teaching and learning in lessons. I visited all classes and teaching groups. I scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, four members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the Diocese of Rochester.

Context

The interim headteacher joined the school three weeks ago, replacing the previous interim headteacher, who had been in place during the autumn terms. The special educational needs coordinator, who was also a part-time class teacher, has left and another teacher is due to leave shortly. The teacher in the Reception/Year 1 class joined the school in January on a temporary contract replacing the previous class teacher. A recently appointed teacher works in the school each Friday. The school is using its Sports Funding to employ a sports coach for one day each week.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' reading and mathematics skills are beginning to improve, particularly in Years 5 and 6, although the rate of progress is not rapid enough to help pupils achieve as well as they should and make up the lost ground caused by long-term inadequate provision. In Year 1, it is the reading and writing skills which are improving and pupils are making the expected progress. Disappointingly, writing continues to be the aspect, across the school, where attainment remains too low and progress is the slowest. Older pupils try hard and are keen to use interesting words and ideas. However, there are still too few opportunities for pupils to write at length and for a variety of purposes. The quality and quantity of writing remains too limited and older pupils' difficulties with handwriting hinders their progress. Many younger pupils form their letters incorrectly and this restricts their fluency. There are some examples where learning is promoted well. For example, during the visit, in a Years 4/5/6 writing lesson, the objectives were clear, pupils understood what good learning would look like, were able to comment on their friends' writing and were given the opportunity to improve their own writing. However, pupils are reticent about sharing their ideas and deductions, and there is little evidence of pupils being given opportunities to use and apply their mathematics skills to solve problems or their reading skills to interrogate texts. The pupils' books show that the older pupils and Year 1 pupils are beginning to produce more work but the writing books in particular throughout the school show that progress is far too slow. Many of the pupils' books in Years 2 and 3 are scruffy with poor presentation, and work is often undated and unfinished.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has not improved significantly overall since the previous inspection. There is still too much teaching which is inadequate and this is reflected in the limited improvement in pupils' progress. Despite significant levels of provision for pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs, the progress of this group of pupils is poor. The teaching of early reading and the sounds that letters make (phonics) has been revised and this has resulted in better focused group work, particularly for pupils who work with the Reception/Year 1 teacher. However, much of the time, pupils are taught by staff who require significant training to be able to effectively teach early reading for nearly five hours every week. Very little reading was seen taking place during these sessions during the inspection. The pace of learning, challenge and opportunities for pupils to make decisions about their learning all remain weak. Throughout this visit, during observations and drop-in visits, Reception children were not given opportunities to learn without direct adult support.

The very recent monitoring and support provided by the interim headteacher is resulting in some improvements. For example, in the oldest class, lessons are planned more effectively with clear objectives. In a mathematics lesson for more-able mathematicians, pupils were really challenged to think and explore equations. In another mathematics group, pupils matched their work to the targets on display, decided when they had achieved the targets and moved on to the next level of activity. Younger pupils worked well in pairs together counting in tens and sequencing number cards. However, too often, pupils are not given enough time to produce independent learning and often, adults do not give the pupils sufficient opportunities to show what they already know and can do. The work in pupils' books shows that expectations are still not high enough and there is insufficient challenge to really push the learning on. In one class, the books suggest that planning has not been carefully thought out in order to develop the learning in a coherent way.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are responding well to the recently introduced behaviour management system. They understand how good behaviour and attitudes are rewarded and also understand the consequences for poor behaviour. Not all adults are implementing the agreed system. Pupils are enthusiastic and well behaved in the better lessons and during assembly. However, when teaching is less effective, or when they are kept waiting with nothing to do, such as when they have finished their lunch, their behaviour and attitudes decline.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

None of the benchmarks or targets for improvement identified in the statement of action has been achieved. This inadequate improvement against the areas identified for improvement resulted in a change in leadership. The recently appointed interim headteacher has only been in post for three weeks and, although urgent action has been taken in several areas, it is too early to see any significant improvements.

There are some positive very early signs, for example the quality of teaching is improving, particularly in the oldest class and for Year 1 pupils, as the teachers implement advice and guidance. The reorganisation of mathematics teaching means that just over half of the pupils are now receiving better provision. The reorganisation of early reading and phonics teaching is not successful because of an overestimation of the capabilities of some staff members so that the current provision is not an improvement for most pupils. The major concern is that there are still significant amounts of inadequate teaching and learning in different parts of the school. Currently, the first priority is to improve the quality of teaching, and therefore the development of subject leadership roles has, rightly, been put on hold.

The interim headteacher has a good understanding of the current weaknesses and he, and the local authority adviser, have shared this information with members of the governing body. The governors know the school better because of regular and focused meetings and monitoring visits. They are aware that continued inadequate provision means that pupils are achieving much less well than they should. Governors are carrying out the actions described in the governors' action plan, although there has been some slippage with the timescales. The school roll has dropped over the past two years and numbers are low. Current predictions for numbers on roll in September are lower still. The school is carrying a large deficit budget, the extent of which is being partially masked by local authority contributions. It is therefore unlikely that the governors will be able to afford to recruit permanent members of staff. Solutions to resolve the budget deficit and consider carefully the viability of the school and its future have not been tackled by the governing body.

External support

The school has benefited from, and continues to receive, a great deal of support from local authority advisers, consultants and colleagues from other schools. For example, external colleagues monitor the quality of teaching and learning, provide guidance and training, support governing body meetings, and have been instrumental in setting up useful assessment and tracking systems. Instability in staffing has hindered the implementation of the local authority's statement of action, and support has not always been built on effectively by school leaders in the past. Local authority colleagues provide valuable first-hand information which underpins the six-weekly progress and impact meetings where progress against the areas identified for improvement is accurately evaluated and a programme of further support identified. The school is heavily dependent on external support both in terms of expertise and finance.