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7 March 2014

Miss Pam Keen
Headteacher
Priory C of E Primary School
Jubilee Road
Trentham
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 8EF

Dear Miss Keen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Priory C of E Primary School

Following my visit with Steve Rigby, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 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 and the Corporate Director of People Services for Stoke-On-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better, particularly in Years 3 and 4, by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide work that closely matches pupils' different needs and abilities so that pupils are effectively challenged and supported in lessons
 - pupils are actively involved in their learning during lessons
 - children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have more frequent access to the outdoor area and that it is well planned for and is as stimulating as the indoor classrooms
 - teaching assistants are fully involved in all parts of lessons to support pupils' learning
 - teachers' marking helps pupils to improve their work and pupils are provided with the time they need to respond to their teachers' comments
 - teachers have the opportunity to observe good and better teaching within and beyond the school.
- Accelerate progress, particularly in Years 3 and 4 and raise standards in writing and mathematics, so that an above-average proportion of pupils reaches the expected levels of attainment by the end of Year 6 by:
 - providing more purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise their writing and write at length in different subjects
 - ensuring that pupils have a secure understanding of basic mathematical skills before going on to more advanced concepts.
- Improve the effectiveness of staff in preventing and dealing with bullying so that pupils' confidence in reporting incidents of bullying grows.
- Improve the impact and effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing the skills of all subject and senior leaders so they use data to assess pupils' performance accurately; and use this information to inform their action plans, in order to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement in their subjects
 - ensuring that all members of the governing body have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities so they can effectively drive the school forward and hold leaders to account.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5-6 March 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board of Governors (IEB) and two other governors. Meetings were also held with the headteacher from St Mark's Church of England Primary School, the local support school, and a local authority representative. The headteacher joined inspectors for nine of the fourteen lesson observations. The headteacher also joined Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) on shorter visits to classrooms to review pupils' learning and look at work in pupils' books. Inspectors met with a group of pupils during lunchtime and spoke with pupils during playtimes. HMI also spoke to approximately 25 parents informally at the start of the second day of the inspection.

Context

There have been a number of changes with staffing since the previous monitoring inspection. Three teachers have resigned, including one senior leader. These teachers will leave at the end of the spring term 2014. Four new teachers will join the school at the beginning of the summer term 2014. The teacher with responsibility for behaviour has recently taken on responsibility for managing provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The supportive partnership with St Mark's Church of England Primary School has reduced significantly.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observations and work in pupils' books confirm that the decline in standards in writing and mathematics has been halted. There are signs that the gap between the standards attained by pupils in the school and pupils nationally, in writing and mathematics, is beginning to close. However, the rate of improvement varies in different classes and for different groups of pupils. For example, more pupils are working at higher levels in mathematics in Year 5 and Year 6, but the most able pupils do not always make fast enough progress in Years 3 and 4. This prevents them from reaching higher standards.

Actions to secure pupils' basic understanding of mathematical skills are having a positive impact. Daily 'rapid recall' mathematics sessions and 'multiplication challenges' are now established in all classes. Pupils are enthusiastic about the sessions. They know their learning targets. They frequently check how well they are doing against their targets. As a result, more pupils are making better progress in basic mathematical skills. However, work in pupils' books shows that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use their skills to try out ideas of their own and solve mathematical problems. This limits the rate of pupils' progress.

Work in pupils' books show that teachers are providing more purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in different subjects. During this monitoring inspection, pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2 were writing reports linked to history and science work. The use

of fewer worksheets is giving pupils more opportunities to write at length. There are signs that this is leading to pupils making faster progress in writing. Despite this, continuing errors in basic punctuation, grammar and spelling are evident across the school. This is preventing pupils from making more rapid progress with their writing.

In all classes, pupils who need extra help with writing and mathematics, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, do not make sufficient progress. This is because of on-going inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

The quality of teaching

Lesson observations during this monitoring inspection and a review of pupils' work confirm leaders' judgement about the quality of teaching. This shows that the majority of teaching requires improvement, with a small proportion that is consistently good or better. Since the previous monitoring inspection, some features of weaker teaching have been improved. However, these improvements are not consistent.

Where aspects of good teaching were observed, pupils of different abilities were aware of what they were expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. For instance, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were provided with opportunities to develop their reasoning skills and apply their knowledge of place value and calculation in order to solve problems. The teacher and teaching assistant used questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and encouraged pupils to explain their reasoning. As a result, all pupils made rapid progress and the most able pupils worked at the higher levels.

Where teaching was weaker, pupils were not always clear about what they were expected to achieve and activities did not match pupils' learning needs. Teachers' feedback in lessons and in books did not help pupils to improve their work and make good progress. In some instances, pupils who need extra support with their work relied too heavily on teaching assistants. As a result, their progress was limited.

Parents have worked with the school to improve the outdoor learning environment. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are mostly provided with a range of well-planned activities which use the outdoor area to enhance learning. During this monitoring inspection, Nursery children were painting outside, using large brushes and sponges to experiment with colours and create a large 'pizza'. They were eager to experiment and share their ideas and were making good progress in their learning.

Teachers' marking has improved. However, as reported previously, it remains inconsistent. Some work in pupils' books shows that errors in basic literacy skills are frequently left uncorrected. Some pupils are misspelling common words, such as the days of the week and the months of the year. This is left unchecked over an extended period of time. This hinders pupils' progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school has made good progress in addressing the issue raised about behaviour in the Ofsted report. As reported previously, pupils feel that the Peer Mediators and the *Rights Respecting Squad* play a valuable part in improving behaviour. Pupils' comments include: 'There is always someone to go to if you feel worried.' and 'It's easy to talk to one of the peer mediators because they are about our age.'

Pupils respond well to the incentives and rewards for good learning and behaviour. They value the class charters and merit awards and they understand the sanctions for poor behaviour. Parents told HMI that they were pleased with the way that the school deals with behaviour. One parent said 'The headteacher deals with poor behaviour – nothing is just left now. Warnings are not given over and over again.'

The school has a detailed system for recording clearly any incidents of poor behaviour and actions taken. These records indicate that the number of incidents has reduced over time. During this monitoring inspection, pupils' behaviour in corridors was orderly and calm. Many pupils collected snacks from the hall to take outside at playtimes. They behaved respectfully towards each other in queues and demonstrated good social skills as they moved into different areas outside.

Attendance has improved and is currently over a full percentage point above the figure for the same period last year. School records indicate that the number of pupils arriving late for school is reducing over time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to lead the school with determination. HMI agree with the staff and parents who said that the headteacher has 'high expectations' and is 'helping to improve the school'. With effective support from other senior leaders she has built upon the improved systems that were introduced to check the progress pupils are making. These systems are now established.

Subject leaders and phase leaders have carefully checked and analysed information related to the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils. They have drawn accurate conclusions and used the information to inform their action plans. For example, they have rightly identified concerns about the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. As a result, senior leaders have redeployed staff and organised further training for support staff. This is a positive development since the previous monitoring inspection. The impact of this is yet to be seen on pupils' achievement.

The headteacher is using robust processes to monitor the quality of teaching and hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes. She has taken decisive action to eradicate inadequate teaching. Senior leaders are regularly observing teachers and checking pupils' work. They are acknowledging what teachers are doing well and what actions need to be taken to help different groups of pupils to make faster progress. There have been some improvements in the quality of teaching since the previous monitoring

inspection. However, these are not yet consistent. This is resulting in continued variation in the quality of teaching and the rates of progress across the school.

The Chair of the IEB continues to provide senior leaders with a good level of support. The IEB members meet fortnightly and check improvements against the actions on the school's improvement plan. They meet regularly with subject leaders for English and mathematics. Documentation shows that they are asking pertinent and challenging questions about the impact of actions on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The IEB members continue to visit the school regularly so that they can check the work of the school for themselves. They have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

External support

Since the previous HMI monitoring inspection, support from the local authority has not been effective. Support from the partner school, brokered by the local authority, was significantly reduced in January 2014. Improvements made to the quality of teaching at Priory are not secure and the local authority is not doing enough to support the school's development in this crucial aspect. There is a lack of clarity between the local authority, school leaders and the IEB about how further improvements to the quality of teaching will be made. The local authority did not attend the half-termly review at the school in the spring term and has not met the deadlines set out in its Statement of Action. As a result, the local authority's target date for the school to be removed from special measures is unknown.

HMI recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the local authority works with the IEB and school leaders to agree the necessary actions required to improve the quality of teaching. The local authority target dates, identified in Section 6 of the Statement of Action, should be adjusted accordingly.