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21 May 2014

Mr Luke Atkinson
The Acting Headteacher
Peasmarsh Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Peasmarsh
Rye
TN31 6UW

Dear Mr Atkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Peasmarsh Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 May 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 December 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 East Sussex and the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, so that it is consistently good and raises pupils' achievement substantially and rapidly, by ensuring that:
 - teachers set pupils appropriate targets in reading, writing and mathematics that indicate clearly what they need to do to improve
 - work is precisely matched to the needs of individual and groups of pupils so that all are engaged by tasks that are at the right level for them
 - all marking is used to indicate clearly what pupils can do and what they need to do next and that teachers check that pupils act on their guidance
 - teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and use this to ensure there are no gaps in pupils' understanding which impede progress
 - pupils develop a secure understanding of basic number facts which they can use to check their answers and move on swiftly in their work.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, in order for them to improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - taking rapid action to tackle underachievement
 - evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately, identifying what the school does well and where it needs to improve, based on realistic information about pupils' achievement and teachers' practice
 - producing improvement plans that are focused and contain measurable steps that will begin to have an impact on pupils' outcomes immediately
 - checking the quality of teaching carefully and regularly, giving teachers specific and helpful feedback and providing appropriate training opportunities so that teachers can improve their practice
 - setting teachers measurable targets, based on pupils' achievement, that identify clearly priorities for improving their performance and provide appropriate and effective training in order to ensure targets are met
 - providing teachers with appropriate support to enable them to develop key skills and secure good subject knowledge
 - ensuring governors hold the school robustly to account.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 May 2014

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher, members of staff, groups of pupils, parents, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority. He observed several lessons, some jointly with senior staff, and looked at pupils' work. He evaluated school documents, such as the improvement plan, teachers' lesson plans, data about how much progress the pupils have made and minutes of meetings. He took account of the 13 responses from parents about the school on Parent View, on the Ofsted website.

Context

There have been few changes since the first monitoring inspection. The headteacher remains absent on medical grounds. The acting headteacher and the executive headteacher continue to be provided by the Rye Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school expects all Year 6 pupils to reach the expected level in English this year, and most pupils to do so in mathematics. Several pupils are expected to achieve higher levels. The inspection evidence accords with this: pupils across the school are performing at about the expected levels in English and getting closer to this point in mathematics. Pupils' handwriting in cursive style is more consistent and neat. The content of their writing is often interesting and correct for the purpose. However, this has required much 'catch up' work during the last few months. Despite the improved progress, pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 in English and, most particularly, mathematics remains below where it should be.

For Year 2, the school expects outcomes in the reading, writing and mathematics national assessments to be about average. Children in Reception are expected to perform well in their assessments.

Pupils entitled to pupil premium funding, and those with special educational needs, broadly achieve as well as their peers, although this is a complex picture with different patterns across the school.

In foundation subjects, pupils' achievement is more patchy. A challenge for the school is to add more value in these subjects; to increase pupils' progress so that the pupils can thrive more in a wider range of activities. For example, all pupils sang confidently together as a whole school under a very knowledgeable specialist teacher. Pupils used dynamic contrast well in some places and one song was in harmony. However, the repertoire was limited and some of the singing inaccurate. There was little evidence that pupils' musical understanding was significantly developed through this singing. Pupils had mixed views about how much they

enjoyed it and had learned. It was useful to discuss with senior leaders and the teacher herself how this positive approach to whole-school singing could raise pupils' attainment and achievement further.

Pupils like their individual academic targets and are responding better to marking comments.

The quality of teaching

Teaching shows notable improvement since the school was deemed to require special measures, most particularly in English lessons. Teachers ensure much better that:

- lessons are interesting and engaging to pupils
- work set in lessons is adapted carefully to meet the needs of each pupil
- they check carefully on how well pupils are learning
- the marking of pupils' work guides pupils better in how to make improvements.

For example, in a Years 5 and 6 lesson, pupils enjoyed improving a piece of descriptive writing, drawing well on learning from previous lessons. The lesson had sufficient pace and clear purpose, but pupils were not rushed. They had enough time to develop their thinking individually and usefully discussed their work with others. They used the teachers' detailed marking comments well to consider and improve their writing. In the infant class, the outdoor area was much better used than it was at the last visit, but there is still more to do to develop the regular 'free flow' of pupils from indoors to outdoors. Pupils nevertheless enjoyed and succeeded in a range of suitably planned and challenging language activities. In a Years 3 and 4 lesson, pupils were suitably engaged in different activities to improve their skills in skimming and scanning texts.

Mathematics teaching is not yet as strong as that in English. However, it has improved. The school has recently purchased a commercially published mathematics scheme. This gives a clear structure to pupils' mathematics work across the school. Teachers and teaching assistants are clear about what they want all groups of pupils to learn. They successfully support learning with effective questioning and explanations. Pupils are given scope to work things out for themselves; they are rarely 'spoon fed' answers. In a Years 3 and 4 lesson, for example, staff usefully enabled pupils to use Venn diagrams autonomously to show relationships between factors. However, pupils are sometimes left to do too many repetitive sums which do not need them to make choices about methods, solve mathematical problems or demonstrate their understanding. Higher attaining pupils are not always provided with work which challenges them sufficiently. Some lessons are too long for the subject matter involved.

The work of teaching assistants has become more purposeful. They are much clearer about which pupils they are supporting and why. They involve particular groups of pupils successfully. In a lesson in the infant class, for example, a well-briefed teaching assistant supported the learning of older pupils well, using good questioning, while the teacher was working with younger pupils in the outdoor area.

Quite correctly, the school is committed to a broad curriculum. The evidence from this inspection visit indicates that teaching is improving in all subjects. However, this improvement is less marked, and the pupils' learning less rapid, in foundation subjects such as history, geography, physical education and music. This is mainly because, although lessons in such subjects are suitably organised and interesting, their subject content is insufficiently demanding. For example, in a lesson on a topic about Africa, the task (designing a leaflet to publicise Water Aid) contained too little specifically geographical content. In a physical education lesson, pupils were inactive for long periods. Consequently, in both cases, pupils made too little progress.

Classrooms, corridors and other areas within the school continue to be attractive and motivating. Displays provide useful information and pose searching questions for pupils to consider. Practical resources, readily available to pupils, encourage independent learning. Target time, which takes place consistently in all classes, gives pupils a useful timeslot to check on their personal targets and respond to teachers' marking.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave calmly, showing genuine interest in lessons. They ask, independently, sensible questions of each other, aiming to improve their work, such as, 'What is a better word than "creepy"?' Pupils are confident to share their ideas, and help and explain things to each other. In this monitoring visit, there were fewer examples of pupils' attention wandering in lessons than was reported at the December inspection.

Pupils enjoy school. Attendance rates are consistently above average. They feel safe and are confident that adults deal quickly with any problems. Although pupils referred to some examples of rough play, they are generally kind and thoughtful to each other, in and out of lessons. This was exemplified clearly in a lesson in the infant class, in which two pupils, who were collecting equipment, accidentally bumped heads. They were both hurt and a little shaken. However, they did not blame each other for what had happened, or make a fuss, but instead showed concern for each other. One became what the nearby teaching assistant called 'a good neighbour' by collecting the cold press for the other pupil to use. They were both quickly back to their mathematics work. An incident such as this, well handled by pupils and staff, is a sign of the caring, calm atmosphere and sensitive leadership within the school. Pupils know they will be cared for and can look out for others.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and the executive headteacher are knowledgeable and ambitious for the school. They rightly expect highly of the staff, whilst also providing them with strong support, training and coaching. They provide stability and clear direction, choosing priorities wisely. The school is moving very much in the right direction. In many areas, such as the teaching of English and developing of the work of teaching assistants, improvement has been particularly rapid.

The school improvement plan continues to be an effective working document, energising change. It now contains revised, sharper objectives, making success easier to measure. Staff are committed to improvement. One teacher spoke for others in saying that the direction of the school 'feels clear and joined up in my head'. Teachers are, therefore, confident and reflective. They say that they feel liberated to develop their work, in a positive atmosphere. Staff performance management, including that for teaching assistants, is well constructed and in step with school priorities. It provides appropriate targets for individual members of staff. Senior leaders check on the progress made towards these supportively and robustly.

Senior leaders evaluate the school correctly. They know where improvement is taking place and where it is still needed. They are also very keen to hear the perspectives of others to sharpen their thinking further. Useful links are forged with many other local schools. For example, teachers regularly and very usefully meet together to moderate samples of pupils' work. The accuracy of teachers' assessments is much improved. Data, showing how well pupils are doing, are much more accurate and better organised.

The acting headteacher notices, and follows up, opportunities. For example, he has seized the chance to enlarge and develop its grounds, to improve the outdoors curriculum. He engages with parents well, as do other staff. He is using pupil premium funding increasingly astutely to raise aspirations and provide opportunities for the eligible pupils, which might be otherwise unavailable. However, the school does not currently describe the impact of this expenditure on outcomes for pupils clearly enough on its website.

Each teacher has responsibility for leading some core and foundation subjects. In a small staff team, this gives a hefty workload, but staff are undertaking it with enthusiasm, supporting each other. They have prepared sensible, simple plans to develop each subject. This has the effect of making their work manageable, as they know what they need to do now and what can be left for the future. These plans are important. As stated earlier, the content of lessons in many subjects is not yet fully vibrant or challenging.

Well led by its Chair, the governing body has continued to develop its work effectively. It has much on its plate. It has to understand and challenge the school's day-to-day work and improvement, as well as make sound strategic decisions about the school's future, possibly as an academy. Governors ask increasingly pertinent and challenging questions of senior staff. Visits to the school by governors, linked to school improvement priorities, have helped sharpen governors' perceptions.

External support

The local authority linked adviser works effectively with senior staff and knows the school well. Other officers work usefully with the school in a number of ways, including improving teaching and providing advice on personnel issues. The local authority is aware that it should evaluate the school's progress more formally and

regularly. It should ensure that nothing important is missed or overlooked, as the school continues to improve. This would be helpful both to governors and senior staff, with their high workloads. The local authority rightly intends to develop this strand of its work urgently.