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14 November 2014

Jonathan Jones
Castlechurch Primary School
Tennyson Road
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Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Castlechurch Primary School

Following my visit with Gerald Griffin, Additional Inspector and Yvonne Brown Associate Inspector to your school on 12–13 November 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 June 2014. 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 Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely
Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Cc. Chair of the Governing Body
Cc. Local authority
Cc. The Secretary of State

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by making sure that all teachers:
 - take account of what pupils already know and can do when teaching, especially more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and the quality of work that they produce
 - provide pupils with precise guidance on how to improve their work.

- Raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by insisting that teachers:
 - make sure pupils read frequently and support them to develop their fluency and understanding
 - teach pupils how to spell correctly, use grammar and punctuation appropriately and write legibly
 - expect pupils to solve harder mathematical problems
 - make sure pupils use and extend their reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge in different subjects.

- Ensure that all leaders and managers:
 - use accurate information on how well different groups of pupils are doing to compare their progress and provide additional support where needed
 - undertake training to develop the skills they need to check carefully the quality of teaching and pupils' learning
 - contribute to school development plans that identify clearly and specifically what improvements are needed and how they will be achieved, who is going to monitor the actions and how the impact of the actions will be assessed.

- Make sure that governors develop their skills so that they can hold leaders and managers to account for pupils' progress.

An external review of governance and the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12–13 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, subject leaders for literacy, reading and mathematics, the inclusion and attendance officer, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, pupils, the Local Leader of Education (LLE) and the local authority commissioning manager for school improvement.

Context

The deputy headteacher left the school after the October holiday. There are three long-term staff absences. Their classes are taught by supply teachers until their return to work. The local authority and governor representatives remain in discussions regarding possible future academy status.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of children making a good level of development by the end of the Reception year remains below the national average. Children progress more securely in reading and mathematics than in writing. All but six pupils achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have improved this year and are now above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Too few pupils attain the higher levels in reading and mathematics. Individual disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs often made good progress from their starting points in reading and writing. However, pupils supported at school action did not achieve as well as they should have done this year in reading, writing or mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils remained about one year behind other pupils nationally in all subjects. Boys did not achieve as well as girls.

The school's data indicate that standards at the end of Key Stage 2 declined from 2013 and remained below average in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils making expected progress by the end of Year 6 was broadly in line with the national average but declined in writing. The most-able pupils made expected progress in all subjects but too few exceeded the expected rates of progress. Disadvantaged pupils do not make similar rates of progress as other pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching

Teachers, teaching assistants, managers and leaders have all benefited from frequent and targeted training and support. Nevertheless, teachers rely heavily on the newly purchased published schemes of work to steer pupils through the necessary steps of subject-related knowledge and understanding. These publications

and resources have inspired both teachers' and pupils' interest in reading and mathematics. As a consequence, pupils are engaged in their learning, know what is expected of them in lessons and are increasingly aware of their longer-term goals for improvement. One pupil explained his enjoyment of mathematics, 'It's exciting now!' The scheme of work for mathematics provides tasks which suitably challenge most pupils' abilities but the most-able pupils are not always stretched sufficiently. The scheme provides a suitable structure for teachers to plan an appropriate range of mathematical topics. However, younger pupils cannot always read the text in the workbooks to follow the instructions without assistance.

Teachers frequently provide clear, written feedback to pupils in their books but pupils' basic and repeated errors are not always identified or corrected. In some, but not all classes, pupils are given time to correct errors and further practise skills. A consistent approach to marking pupils' work has not been established and teachers' corrections are not always accurate. For example, in one case, inspectors found some spelling errors in teachers' feedback. In another, the teacher had marked work in a mathematics book correct when in fact the pupil had used the wrong mathematical symbol in their written calculation. English exercises are completed in a range of books and therefore it is difficult for teachers or leaders to make accurate judgements about pupils' measurable achievements and rates of progress in writing.

Leaders have understandably established whole school priorities relating to the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in March this year. Teachers now use much more of the available time to teach and apply the basic skills associated with mathematics, reading and writing. However, these priorities are adopted at the expense of the wider curriculum, for example, history, geography and science as well as the practical subjects, such as art and design technology. As a consequence, pupils are not developing the necessary subject-related knowledge and skills. Furthermore, teachers have not identified suitable and relevant links between subjects to apply the skills learned in reading, writing or mathematics to their work in other subjects.

Teaching assistants have varying degrees of capability but they are not always deployed effectively to have the greatest impact on supporting groups of pupils. Where learning is most effective, teaching assistants knowledgeably and confidently lead well-planned activities. In other lessons, they remain on the periphery of the class offering occasional words of encouragement to a single pupil. This is not an effective use of their knowledge, skills or expertise.

The Nursery and Reception classes are well organised and provide a stimulating environment. Adults prepare a broad range of activities for children but the extensive choice offered to children does not focus appropriately on consolidating or practising the skills they are being taught. Too often, adults teach clear and appropriate skills, for example in letters and sounds, but then provide activities which are not associated with the learning focus. Opportunities to learn outdoors are

too often extended classroom activities rather than built around the outdoor resources or facilities. Children are eager to learn and suitably self-motivated.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Relationships between pupils and adults are positive. Pupils have a pride in their school and are even keen that teachers and teaching are seen in the best possible light. Pupils feel well looked after and they are happy and proud of their school.

Pupils believe that behaviour is improving. They feel safe in school and they say that bullying is rare. They are confident that any concern regarding bullying would be dealt with quickly and effectively by the headteacher. Older pupils know about most but not all forms of bullying, for example homophobic bullying.

Pupils are well-informed about how to keep safe. For example the younger pupils knew about crossing the road safely and the older pupils were well-informed about how to keep themselves safe on the internet.

Pupils are polite and show an impressive degree of mutual respect and good manners in classrooms and around the school. The detailed records compiled by the school provide evidence of improved behaviour over time. Pupils confirm this view and say this is because of more interesting lessons especially in mathematics where they believe learning is much more fun. The code of conduct is clear and pupils are suitably aware of rewards and sanctions.

Attitudes towards learning are improving and this is clear from the way pupils listen attentively in lessons and ask teachers pertinent questions to make their work better. Pupils' positive efforts are evident in their books which are generally neat and tidy and the way older pupils use information about their levels to check their own progress.

Attendance is improving but there is a significant gap between the rates of absence of disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has responded appropriately to the areas for development identified in the inspection. However, there has been an historic lack of clarity regarding leadership and management roles. There is a lack of delegated responsibilities to those staff on the upper pay scale. The headteacher has been too slow in identifying the necessary roles and responsibilities suitable for this group of staff. These roles are under review but job descriptions have not been given to inform teachers' performance management or to hold individuals to account.

Leaders are currently reliant on extensive external support to build expertise and enable rigorous strategic planning for further improvement and development. The headteacher and assistant headteacher have introduced a cycle of checks on lessons and pupils' work to inform the next steps in school improvement. Each review cycle helps leaders to identify relevant strengths and agree immediate short-term priorities. This method is helping to determine future training and support.

As a result of training and the recently introduced schemes of work, staff are developing more accuracy in measuring the progress made by groups of pupils over time. The assistant headteacher provides clear and well-considered direction in the delivery of mathematics. The implementation of literacy is less secure and remains dependent upon the delivery of the newly adopted published schemes. Pupils are less positive about their experiences of reading and writing than they are of mathematics.

There is no current overview of provision or targeted support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs to secure their progress. There is no clear strategy or accountability for the support and intervention for disadvantaged pupils so that their needs are met. Governors have not been provided with detailed information regarding how additional government funding intended for this group has brought about improved and measurable outcomes for pupils. Gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils nationally and those in the school have not closed.

The review of governance was taken as a positive development and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body lost no time in establishing appropriate priorities including strategic planning, performance management and review, communication and engagement and planning effective, purposeful meetings. Governors have a relevant range of knowledge, experience and expertise.

Governors have recognised their responsibilities for providing the school with an appropriate level of challenge and do so increasingly effectively. They have created a committee structure with clear responsibilities and expectations. Individual governors are linked with specific aspects of the school's work. Governors correctly recognise that initiatives to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils require robust leadership and accountability. They have a clear view of the school, its outcomes and the reasons underpinning its performance. Governors stated that they have seized upon the requirement for special measures as a journey in which they can be increasingly strategically involved.

The single central record and arrangements for safeguarding during the inspection met requirements.

External support

The Local Leader of Education (LLE) is an asset to the school. Her ideas, suggestions and training have led to substantial changes to bring about the necessary improvements. Teachers from Castlechurch have observed good quality teaching at her school and brought back helpful methods and ideas. The LLE has contributed significantly to the distribution of leadership by showing phase leaders how to oversee the quality of teaching and the progress made by pupils. The LLE and assistant headteacher have ensured that the phase leaders have the appropriate support to help them fulfil their new roles and responsibilities. The local authority has provided substantial and sustained support and training for all staff. In addition, targeted support has been provided where necessary. The commissioning manager for school improvement has a clear and accurate view of the school and its performance.