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14 November 2014

Ms Jo Warnock
The Headteacher
St Johns Church of England Primary School
St John's Place
Canterbury
CT1 1BD

Dear Ms Warnock

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Johns Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Julie Sackett, additional inspector, to your school on 12 and 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 February 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 Interim Executive Board (IEB), the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - improving teachers' behaviour management to ensure that pupils behave well and pay attention in lessons, and that more lesson time is devoted to helping pupils learn
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of pupils, to retain their interest and raise their achievement
 - focusing on improving pupils' basic skills, especially in mathematics, and building on what pupils already know to make sure that work is set at the right level for them
 - improving the teaching of phonics, ensuring that pupils practise their sounds regularly, that they are heard reading more often and that pupils' reading records show parents and carers their children's phonics targets
 - making sure that teachers' marking gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, and their ability to use more interesting vocabulary when writing
 - identifying the most-able pupils' skills early and ensuring they have regular opportunities for higher-level work, including in mathematics
 - ensuring that pupils' reading tasks across all subjects are matched to their abilities
 - providing additional support to raise the achievement of those pupils in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, attendance and punctuality by:
 - effectively tackling and reducing incidents of poor behaviour and the number of exclusions
 - ensuring that teachers consistently implement the behaviour policy, and that senior leaders and governors closely monitor its impact
 - implementing robust procedures and working closely with families to raise attendance rapidly and to improve punctuality.
- Improve the skills of leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, by:
 - reviewing the leadership structure, clarifying roles and developing the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they take a full part in improving teaching and pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that teachers are provided with well-judged training leading to good subject knowledge, in order that their teaching of English and mathematics becomes consistently effective
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan gives more subject-specific actions for improving English and mathematics, showing how actions will be checked and judged, and who will be responsible for them
 - improving performance management systems to ensure that teachers' pay is linked to their performance

- ensuring that members of the governing body receive training backed up with detailed and accurate information about the school's performance so they are better able to challenge school leaders.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including teaching and learning in all classes, and looked at the work in pupils' books. They also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other school leaders, all members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and representatives from the local authority and the diocese.

Context

Three teachers joined the school in September. The governing body has been replaced by an IEB. The building work has not yet been completed and this continues to cause some disruption.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics and the progress they make remain well below average across the school. However, there are some encouraging, if rather fragile, signs of improvement. There was an increase in the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected levels in the summer term check on early reading skills and small but important improvements in the Years 2 and 6 tests in reading, writing and mathematics. The gaps are narrowing between the achievements of different groups of pupils, for example, the gap between those eligible for additional government funding and others. There is a very gradual increase in the number of pupils who are working at the levels appropriate for their ages. However, the levels of skills of pupils in Years 4 and 5 are far too low because they made very slow progress last year. There is still a lot of ground to make up for pupils of all ages.

The improvements are less evident in writing and, across the school, this remains a significant weakness. Although pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work are improving, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length and this is very evident in their books. In some lessons seen during this visit, the pupils were not given the opportunity, nor were they expected to produce sufficient work. Some opportunities, for example in mathematics lessons, were missed for pupils to record their findings in a systematic way.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is also improving slowly. Despite being situated in the middle of a building site, the school is vibrant and welcoming. Staff have worked hard to make classrooms interesting with useful materials available and on display to support learning. The objectives for learning are sharper and the quality of marking

has improved. Teachers are trying to make learning more engaging and relevant, for example, during the visit Year 2 pupils enjoyed weighing out the ingredients to make cakes. In Year 4, pupils enthusiastically took part in activities led by trainee teachers to develop their understanding of different languages. Similarly Key Stage 2 pupils enthusiastically joined in the singing in assembly. In one of the Reception classes there is a positive learning atmosphere with clear routines and expectations and children are keen to use the good opportunities for them to learn. These examples show that if the pupils are interested they are keen to take part and to learn. However, generally throughout the school there are still times in lessons when pupils are not fully involved, they do not always have enough to do and the pace of their learning is too slow. Although behaviour has improved, particularly in the older classes, teachers are not capitalising on this to extend the learning.

Teachers plan carefully and generally try to make sure that activities are matched to pupils' different abilities. The match is not quite right yet. For example, in some of the early reading and writing sessions, the activities were too hard for some pupils and too easy for others. Teachers' expectations about how much pupils can be expected to do are still too low and there remains insufficient challenge for most pupils. There are lessons where the adults do too much and, as a result, there is too little time for the pupils to do enough work in sufficient depth. Often, when whole-class sessions go on too long, or teachers stop the pupils for further explanation, pupils become bored and their attention strays. This, and when they are not sure what they are supposed to be doing, is when low-level poor behaviour is most obvious.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There have been significant and very obvious improvements in both behaviour and attendance. The school leader who manages these aspects has clearly worked very effectively with pupils and families to improve attendance which is now close to the national average. However, there is still a higher than average number of pupils whose attendance is very poor. More pupils are coming to school regularly although they do not always get there on time, so punctuality is still a problem.

Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and there has been a sharp fall in the number of instances of poor behaviour and exclusions. Behaviour records are thorough and carefully analysed. The pupils move around the school safely and sensibly despite the many obstacles which remain as a result of the ongoing building work.

The pupils' behaviour for learning is less secure. They quickly lose concentration and are often slow to start work. These attitudes are compounded by low expectations of their learning. This is exemplified by one of the strategies used to support good behaviour. Twice during the visit, pupils who had misbehaved were sitting apart

from the others with a timer. Although this strategy gives them an opportunity to think about their behaviour, the pupils did not have to take their work with them during this time-out session so learning time was wasted. There are still inconsistencies in how the behaviour policy is implemented. For example, in one session, behaviour was accepted from some pupils but others were reprimanded for the same behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders at senior and middle levels have clear roles and responsibilities and are beginning to fulfil these more effectively. The headteacher has benefited from coaching and mentoring from a headteacher in a neighbouring school and from the weekly sharply focused meetings with the chair of the IEB. The two assistant headteachers and the pastoral leader have also developed their knowledge and skills so that they are increasingly influential. This is particularly noticeable in the area of teaching and learning where the group of inexperienced staff are now receiving valuable support, which is required to help them develop into effective teachers. There are subject leaders for mathematics, writing and reading who also have responsibility for leading groups of classes along with the early years leader. This group have taken up these responsibilities relatively recently and are being given time and support to be able to carry out their roles. There are clear expectations about lines of accountability and delegation so that leadership and management are now shared and more effective. Throughout the leadership team there is a better understanding of the extent of the problems facing the school. Although the quality of expertise and effectiveness within the leadership team is variable, there is an improving sense of purpose, resolve and decisiveness in tackling difficulties.

The IEB members contribute valuable experience and expertise. They have swiftly organised themselves so that each is responsible for one of the main areas for improvement identified during the section 5 inspection. The chair has set out specific questions for each area to support them when challenging the school leaders and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken to improve. It is important that all of the information about support being provided to the school should be shared with the IEB to avoid any overlap or duplication. The board should also make sure that targets are sufficiently sharp and measurable so that they can evaluate whether improvements are happening quickly enough.

The diocese is in the process of discussing the school's move to academy status within the diocese of Canterbury's multi-academy Trust. They are keen to ensure a period of calm and stability in the school following a period of considerable uncertainty. As a result, the move to become an academy is not likely to happen for some time.

External support

The local authority senior improvement advisor has continued to work with the school to ensure that there is continuity and coherence in the support provided. She has supported monitoring activities, for example, by working alongside the mathematics leader and the headteacher. The local authority also facilitated the link between the school and Joy Lane Primary School. This link is proving successful, particularly in supporting the headteacher and other leaders in developing their skills and their confidence.