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27 November 2014

Christopher Errington
Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Hazel Grove
Bedworth
CV12 9DA

Dear Mr Errington

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Veronica McGill, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25–26 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 January 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 Warwickshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - there are high expectations of pupils
 - gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are identified and action is taken to close them
 - pupils understand the next steps they need to take in their learning
 - questioning enables pupils to think more deeply.
- Ensure that the progress of boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics is consistently good or better by:
 - making phonics sessions more demanding so pupils acquire these skill more rapidly
 - improving the quality of pupils' handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - increasing the importance and impact of homework throughout the school.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - improving the rigour with which school leaders hold teachers responsible for the progress pupils make
 - improving governors' and all staff's understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that plans for improvement deal with accurately identified weaknesses quickly through clear actions, targets and time frames
 - improving the use of information about pupil progress by teachers and school leaders so that weaknesses are identified more accurately

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, other school staff, pupils, parents, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the coordinator for special educational needs has left the school. Another teacher has taken on responsibility for this area. One teacher has returned from maternity leave. Three teachers have joined the school; one in a part-time capacity. One member of support staff has begun maternity leave and another has joined the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is improving in reading, writing and mathematics because more pupils are making good progress in most subjects. Nevertheless, standards are still too low overall and some pupils achieve less well than others.

Standards in mathematics have risen since the school was placed in special measures. Pupils' scores in the 2014 Key Stage 2 national tests compared well with those in other schools, being a little above average. Pupils currently in Years 1 to 6 are making steady progress. Not all pupils achieve well in mathematics because the quality of teaching remains varied.

Leaders reviewed the approach to teaching phonics (knowledge about letters and the sounds they make) in response to the inspection judgement. Teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 have worked with a successful local school to establish a more lively approach to delivering these lessons. Pupils were observed enjoying a phonics lesson as they tried to recognise sounds displayed by the teacher. They became quite excited by the teacher's challenge to do this more and more quickly. Pupils' skills in phonics are improving as a result of improved teaching. The proportion that achieved the expected standard in the national check for Year 1 pupils rose considerably in 2014 and was a little above the national figure. There remains a legacy of the previous weak provision, however. Some pupils in Key Stage 2 do not have good enough phonics knowledge to help them read confidently or to spell words correctly. This is one reason why pupils' spelling remains poor.

Better teaching of reading led to improved results in the Key Stage 2 national test this year. Although higher than the previous year, standards remain below average because not all pupils make consistently good progress in reading. The newly implemented approach to teaching reading has had limited impact because it is not

used consistently well by all teachers. The books on display in almost all classrooms are uninspiring and not attractively presented. The joy of reading is not celebrated around the school, including in the large library. This does not promote interest in books or a thirst for reading.

Teachers are taking a more systematic approach to teaching grammar and punctuation, so pupils' writing is becoming more accurate. However, pupils have too few opportunities to apply these basic skills into interesting pieces of writing. So, while the mechanics of writing are improving, the overall quality of pupils' work is not good enough to achieve the standards of which many are capable. Writing is not given a high enough profile around the school. Very little writing from pupils is on display. That which is shown is not celebrated, so pupils see little value in the activity.

Pupils know teachers expect them to join their letters when they write. The strong emphasis on introducing an agreed approach to handwriting has had mixed results. Younger pupils are learning to join letters correctly and often write neatly. Many older pupils have struggled to overcome previously acquired writing habits, so do not find it easy to write fluently and legibly. Some use pens before they have appropriate skill levels. This leads to messy books. Some pupils are aware of this and felt uncomfortable showing their books to inspectors. Some teachers do not insist that pupils present work neatly, accepting untidy writing, unsightly crossings out and scribbles. Some teachers' own handwriting in pupils' books is unacceptable, occasionally being of noticeably poorer quality than that of the pupils.

The quality of teaching

Teachers now set more demanding tasks and usually make it clear to pupils what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. As a result, pupils are making better progress in most lessons. This happens often in mathematics lessons because most teachers are skilled at pitching the challenge at the right level to move pupils' learning on quickly. Teachers mark pupils' mathematics work effectively. Their comments help pupils to understand why they have made mistakes and to correct errors for themselves.

While pupils are developing secure basic number skills, their understanding of mathematics is limited because teachers do not enable pupils to develop mastery in different concepts. In one class, pupils' books showed they were just getting to grips with adding three numbers together. Next, the teacher taught them how to recognise the coins we use. Pupils did not go on to practise using their addition skills by adding together the value of three coins because the teacher moved on to a different aspect of mathematics too quickly. Similarly, teachers tend to stretch the most-able pupils by pushing them up to the next level too soon, rather than first ensuring they can apply mathematical knowledge in complex situations.

A similar situation exists with the teaching of writing. Teachers teach pupils how to write grammatically correct sentences using increasingly sophisticated techniques. Marking is generally well focused on helping pupils to secure these skills. As a result, pupils' writing is, on the whole, technically competent. However, standards in writing are low because teachers do not help pupils to create and shape interesting pieces of text that capture readers' interest and imagination. This is illustrated by pupils' writing targets. These help pupils write very complex sentences but do not challenge pupils to apply this skill using lively, interesting language or unusual authorial tricks. This has come about because training has focused solely on improving teachers' knowledge of the mechanics of writing. There has been no training to increase teachers' skills in teaching pupils to write more creatively.

Teachers have been trained in using questions to help build pupils' thinking skills. Some teachers now do this well. For example, in one class, pupils were challenged to explain how they solved a mathematical puzzle. The teacher probed initial responses using increasingly demanding questions about the mathematical processes involved. This helped pupils to think sequentially, to link ideas and to make reasoned judgements based on secure understanding. Not all teachers are as skilled. Sometimes, when a pupils' answer indicates they have misunderstood, the teacher does not probe further or address the gap in the pupils' knowledge. A more common weakness is that teachers do not use questions often enough to adjust lessons to support or challenge pupils appropriately. For example, some younger pupils observed were left to struggle with a mathematics task that was too hard for them because the teacher did not check soon enough how they were getting on. In another class, a pupil had finished his mathematics worksheet quickly because he had found it too easy. The teacher did not check this and so did not challenge him further.

Parents are pleased that children now receive regular homework. They say homework tasks are more challenging than previously. Pupils enjoy doing homework. Homework books show tasks are linked to what pupils are learning in school and that work is marked regularly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy learning, so they behave well in lessons. There is little disruption in lessons, as pupils readily follow instructions and concentrate on their work. Even the very youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage display impressive levels of concentration and perseverance while working on their own. Pupils usually try hard with their work, even when it is too difficult or too easy. Sometimes, however, pupils get frustrated when the work set is not at the right level, so they become distracted while waiting for the teacher to check how they are doing.

Pupils appreciate the effort teachers put into setting and marking homework. This is demonstrated in their books, which show they complete tasks on time and with care.

Pupils are proud of their school and look after equipment sensibly. Nevertheless, they are aware that some parts of the school are untidy, or appear uninviting, and would like these to be improved. This general untidiness mirrors the poor presentation of work in Years 4 to 6.

The school has remained vigilant in following up pupils' absences. Attendance rates continue to improve, but are still much lower than the national figure.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Governors have responded well to advice and training since the section 5 inspection. Consequently, governance has improved notably. Governors are more confident to challenge the headteacher. They are becoming more effective in doing so because they have a better understanding of how to interpret information about pupils' achievement. Governors are increasingly discerning about what information they need and are more assertive in making sure that requests for better information are met. For example, governors now know that the headteacher's reports about pupils' achievement are not updated frequently enough, nor do they contain sufficient detail about the progress of particular groups of pupils. The impact of this is that governors' views of the quality of teaching have been largely based on out-of-date information or anecdotal evidence.

The headteacher keeps a termly record of the progress of each class in reading, writing and mathematics. He uses this to identify classes where pupils are not making expected progress. This tracking has not been frequent enough or sufficiently focused on the progress made by different groups of pupils. This means leaders do not target support effectively to ensure pupils who need to catch up do so quickly. A new electronic system for recording pupils' scores has recently been introduced. This is being developed to provide teachers with guidance on how to judge pupils' achievements in the new National Curriculum (effective from September 2014). It is not fully operational at present. The headteacher demonstrated how this new system will enable him to overcome the issues within the current approach and to use data about pupils' achievement more effectively to speed up improvement.

The headteacher revised the system for setting teachers' annual performance targets. This year's targets reflect increased expectations for pupils' achievement. However, the measures used in these targets are not sufficiently refined to promote high achievement for more-able pupils. The headteacher now bases judgements about teachers' performance on a wider range of evidence, rather than relying on lesson observations. This has helped him to build a more realistic view of teaching quality.

A new leadership structure has been established but it is not clear how this will improve accountability. There is currently an overlap between the roles of middle and senior leaders. The headteacher discusses individual pupils' progress with teachers but does not have an overview of the difference teachers are making to pupils' achievement. Senior leaders rely on subject leaders to check whether teachers are following agreed practices, but do not use the information well to challenge weaker performance or identify what support needs to be provided.

Leaders have organised a number of training and development activities. Some have worked well, such as the project to improve the quality of phonics teaching for younger pupils. Others have had less impact because leaders have not checked whether teachers are following the advice they have been given. This is why the training on questioning has had mixed results. Training has not focused sufficiently on the priority areas and has been too insular. Little has been delivered by specialists. Few teachers have visited other schools to gain experience of outstanding teaching. This has happened because the school has not been given adequate external support.

External support

Local authority officers have made a small number of visits to the school to discuss the progress being made. The local authority helped the school to set up the successful phonics project. However, it has not facilitated appropriate support for the school to address all the weaknesses identified in the section 5 inspection. The local authority has not worked effectively with the school to broker effective training for teachers. Monitoring of teaching continues to lack rigour because leaders have not been shown how to do this effectively. Her Majesty's Inspector strongly recommends that the school should work with a successful primary school to support leaders in building on improvements made to this point.