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6 February 2015

Mrs T Cross
Acting Headteacher
St White's Primary School
St White's Road
Cinderford
GL14 3DH

Dear Mrs Cross

Special measures monitoring inspection of St White's Primary School

Following my visit with Paul Jones, Associate Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 February 2015, 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 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring:
 - teachers use the information they hold on pupils to plan learning activities that are not too easy or too difficult for the different groups in their classes, especially the more able and those with special educational needs
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve, especially the more able
 - pupils are provided with clear guidance on what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do in a single lesson or series of lessons
 - teachers mark work so that pupils know what and how to improve and have opportunities to respond to marking quickly.
- Ensure that all groups of pupils consistently make good progress and attain more highly in English and mathematics across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 by:
 - improving pupils' basic skills in mathematics by giving them more chances to apply those skills and to use them in other subjects
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to write in different styles in other subject areas to develop and widen their skills in writing
 - ensuring that the progress made by pupils eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs is faster and any gaps in their skills and understanding are closed more quickly.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that school leaders at all levels use the information they hold on how well different groups of pupils are doing to compare their progress and intervene where appropriate
 - producing school development plans that identify clearly and specifically how improvements are to be achieved, who is going to monitor the actions and how the impact of the actions is to be assessed
 - developing middle leaders further so that they can effectively review the quality of teaching and learning and use their skills to coach other teachers by modelling good and outstanding teaching
 - ensuring the governing body holds the school rigorously to account by monitoring the impact of actions aimed at raising the achievement of different groups of pupils such as those eligible for pupil premium funding.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised relevant documents. Inspectors also met with the acting headteacher and other members of staff, pupils, parents, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority. The lead inspector also telephoned the school's external adviser and a third local authority representative.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the substantive headteacher has resigned. The governing body has advertised the post with the expectation that the successful applicant will join the school in September 2015. The school is currently being led by the deputy headteacher, who has been appointed as the acting headteacher.

Two teachers have resigned. One teacher left the school in October 2014 and the second leaves the school in February 2015. One governor has also resigned and a new member of the governing body was appointed but, due to unforeseen circumstances, has resigned.

Building work on the new school has begun and is currently on schedule to be completed by December 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's efforts to increase pupils' progress and raise standards are showing some success. This is apparent because the quality of teaching is improving in some classes and year groups, but not all. As a result, pupils are making good progress in some classes, but this is inconsistent across the school. This situation has come about partly because of numerous staffing changes, which have impeded the ability of the school's leaders to ensure consistent rates of improvement in all classes. The headteacher and governing body are tackling this issue, which is evident in the improving quality of teaching seen.

Inspection evidence confirms that children in the Reception class do well. For example, they are learning their phonics skills (sounds that letters make) and using their growing understanding to begin sounding out unfamiliar words. The children are also taught handwriting skills, which helps to ensure that they begin to form letters correctly and start to develop their writing abilities. The school's assessment of children's achievement at the end of the Reception Year in 2014 shows that they made good progress during their first year.

In contrast, the proportion of Year 1 pupils at the school reaching the expected standard in the 2014 phonics screening check was lower than the previous year and

considerably below the national average. Overall, girls and boys performed poorly and the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the year was wider than in 2013. School leaders have now strengthened the quality of phonics teaching. As a result, the school's monitoring data indicate that the current Year 1 pupils will do well in 2015. Leaders expect that the 2015 results will be higher than those achieved in 2014 and be closer to the national average.

The attainment of Year 2 pupils improved in 2014 to be broadly in line with the national average. There was little difference in the performance of boys and girls. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was very similar to other pupils in reading and mathematics, but slightly below in writing. The attainment of the few pupils with special educational needs was not as high as teachers and leaders had expected.

This inconsistency in the quality of teaching is evidenced by the 2014 Year 6 results. Despite showing a small improvement on the previous year's figures, pupils' attainment was significantly below the national average. There are significant differences in the performance of groups. Boys out-performed girls in mathematics, reading and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the year group narrowed in reading, it increased for mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. In mathematics, the attainment gap shows that disadvantaged pupils were two years behind the other pupils in the year group. The attainment of pupils with special educational needs improved on the previous year's results, but was still below that of other pupils in the year group. Overall, there was little improvement in the results obtained by the more able pupils.

The school's efforts to improve pupils' performance this year are showing some signs of encouragement. Towards the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' progress does improve, with current pupils in Years 5 and 6 doing well. Leaders' predictions for pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 are that standards will be in line with the national average. Leaders also expect the current Year 6 pupils to achieve results that are in line with the national average for reading, writing and mathematics and to be higher than average for the more able pupils.

The quality of teaching

The school's senior leaders are fully focused on improving the quality of teaching. As a result, teachers are developing the skills needed to reflect on the quality of their work and assess its impact on their pupils' progress. The school's leaders have introduced regular opportunities for teachers to review pupils' progress. This strategy is providing teachers with up-to-date information about pupils' attainment. When teachers use the information well they plan learning activities which are suitable for every pupils' needs and enable them to make good progress. As yet, this is not a consistent practice across the school, as some teachers still provide pupils in their classes with the same work, regardless of their ability. The impact of this approach means that work is not sufficiently challenging for the more able pupils

and the activity does not meet the needs of those who find learning more difficult. As a consequence, pupils' progress is inhibited.

Observations of teaching indicate that not all the teachers challenge pupils sufficiently to deliver their best work. The work seen in pupils' books during the inspection provides evidence that the standard of presentation is not high enough. Teachers are not making their expectations sufficiently clear to pupils that work must be completed to a high standard. Similarly, some teachers do not notice if pupils are able to form and write their letters and numerals correctly. When this happens, these pupils continue to write poorly without being able to improve the presentation of their work.

The school has introduced a revised approach to marking pupils' work. As a result of this initiative, teachers are routinely marking pupils' work in accordance with the policy. Pupils understand that comments written in pink highlight good work and those in green provide suggestions about what to do next. However, some teachers do not write comments with the pupils' reading abilities in mind. This means that these pupils do not fully understand the wording and, as a result, are unable to respond. At present, there is limited evidence to indicate that pupils are taking account of teachers' recommendations for improving their work. Where this is the case, pupils are not enabled to make better progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well around school and play together sensibly. The pupils spoken to during the monitoring inspection believe that behaviour has improved since the school introduced its new behaviour policy. This positive view is supported by first-hand observations and conversations with parents, teachers and lunchtime staff.

Pupils are polite and demonstrate good manners. They are proud of their school and take good care of their playground equipment. Some of the older pupils take responsibility for initiating games that include younger pupils. This demonstrates the positive and friendly atmosphere that exists throughout the school.

Pupils behave very well in assemblies, as they show care and appreciation for the achievements of others. The Years 5 and 6 pupils set a very good example to younger pupils about how to behave in these situations.

The school site is well cared for. It is almost entirely free of litter as the pupils are diligent in taking care to use the litter bins.

Pupils are confident that there are very few instances of bullying. Pupils talk positively about the support the school has provided to raise awareness of bullying and its impact on an individual's self-esteem.

The school has recently held pupil elections for new school councillors. The staff are already compiling a list of topics that the new school councillors can debate. This

development is seen as a way of encouraging pupils to take some responsibility for the future direction of their school.

The majority of pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. When pupils do lose interest in lessons, this can often be attributed to activities that are not matched well enough to their interest or ability. Although the work in pupils' books is of a variable standard, pupils do take care of their books and those books seen during the monitoring inspection were well looked after.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school's efforts to improve pupils' attendance appear to have stalled and absence levels have increased slightly from last year. To address this situation, the school's leaders have instigated a range of new strategies to target pupils with low levels of attendance. Leaders are monitoring the impact of these initiatives to determine how well they are succeeding in reducing pupils' absence.

Pupils are confident that they are safe at school. They trust the adults working at the school and are confident that any issues they want to raise will be treated seriously. The school staff are very focused on the need to ensure pupils' safety when crossing the road that runs between the two sites. As part of their efforts to ensure pupils' safety on the road, leaders recently asked the police to conduct a speed survey. This resulted in all drivers travelling at 34 miles per hour and above being spoken to and advised about the need to reduce their speed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring inspection, the quality of the school's leadership has continued to strengthen. The headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body work together as a very effective team and provide the strong and determined leadership needed. Working together, they have a clear view about the school's strengths and the areas where improvement is required.

The focus on raising the quality of teaching has, to some extent, been hindered by the turbulence in staffing. Since the inspection in December 2013, there has been a considerable turnover of staff, with one class having been taught by four teachers since September 2014. At the time of this monitoring inspection, the staffing situation had not been fully resolved and still features as a key improvement priority for the school.

The school's senior leaders work well together. They meet regularly to consider and compare how well different groups of pupils are performing. This approach is enabling the senior leaders to monitor the impact of teachers' work and hold them to account for pupils' learning.

The school's improvement plans are detailed and focused appropriately on the areas identified as needing strengthening. The school's leaders regularly review the

progress being made against each priority and they have a good understanding about the school's development and rate of improvement.

The teachers with responsibility for leading each key stage are making a positive contribution that is helping the school to improve. They are fully committed to raising the standards pupils achieve. As they take on greater responsibilities, they are working increasingly with teachers in their respective key stages in order to promote greater consistency of teaching practice across the school.

As a result of recent staffing changes, the teacher with the lead responsibility for mathematics has recently changed. The current post-holder is providing strong leadership and is demonstrating good subject knowledge. He has quickly identified the need to ensure that all teachers possess the necessary skills and subject knowledge so that pupils are enabled to make good progress each year.

The post holder for English has recently relinquished the role. At present, the school does not have a teacher with overall responsibility for English. Although the role is being covered by senior leaders and the key stage leaders, this arrangement is not providing the level of attention needed. Consequently, there are inconsistencies in teachers' expectations about what pupils should learn and be able to do in the different year groups. As a result, pupils are not enabled to make consistently good progress.

The inclusion leader is not delivering the level of expertise needed. She does not have the necessary knowledge and understanding about the role and, as a result, is not contributing sufficiently to the school's efforts to improve the performance of pupils with special educational needs.

Senior leaders have not ensured that timetables for each class are sufficiently detailed. Consequently, the presentation of the timetables is inconsistent and the information does not provide a clear overview of the time spent teaching each subject. Similarly, although there is a strong and appropriate focus on teaching English and mathematics, it is not clear whether the pupils are spending enough time on other subjects, such as physical education.

The governing body is focused firmly on improving the quality of education delivered across the school. Governors work together well and are growing in confidence as they develop new skills and increase their knowledge and understanding of the role they play in leading the school. The Chair of the Governing Body works closely with the local authority to ensure that the school is benefiting from relevant training opportunities that support the school's work.

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

During the inspection, the inspectors spoke to a number of parents to gather their views about the school's progress. The parents commented that they are pleased to see that the school is improving and that the leadership team is taking appropriate

action to strengthen the quality of education being provided. They are also pleased with the progress their children are making and they commented positively about the information they receive. Parents also told inspectors that they are looking forward to the building work on the new school being completed.

External support

The school continues to benefit from the support provided by the local authority. The school's senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body recognise and value the advice, guidance and support that have been provided. The local authority's regular reviews of the school's progress help to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on each improvement priority.

The majority of the local authority's input has been to improve and strengthen the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This training has focused on raising teachers' understanding of the need for day-in and day-out good quality teaching that builds on pupils' prior experiences. The authority's support has also benefited teachers who have leadership responsibilities. As a result, most of the school's middle leaders are increasingly leading the improvement of teaching in their respective areas.

The local authority has also enabled the school to benefit from opportunities to work with other local schools that have been recognised as delivering high quality provision. Staff have visited these schools to observe aspects of their work and gain experience of high quality provision. The impact of these visits is evident in that the school is reviewing aspects of its own practise to determine whether it best meets the pupils' needs.

The local authority has recently evaluated the school's support for pupils with special educational needs. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the report had not been published, but the school is already considering how best to respond to the points arising.