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16 February 2015

Christopher Errington
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 to your school on 11–12 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 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 not making enough 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 Warwickshire and the Diocese of Coventry.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

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The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The lead and team inspectors.

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 third monitoring inspection on 11–12 February 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior staff, a group of teachers and teaching assistants, the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body, and representatives from the local authority and the Diocese of Coventry. The inspector took account of the 13 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke informally to several parents as they brought their children to school. The inspector visited classrooms to look at pupils' books and talk to them about their learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, one teacher has left the school. Temporary arrangements in place for this class mean that pupils are taught by several teachers each week. Teachers in Key Stage 2 and some subject leaders have received support from Croft Junior School, a local successful school whose headteacher is a Local Leader in Education (LLE). The school is in the process of converting to sponsored academy status within the Diocese of Coventry multi-academy trust. The anticipated date of conversion is 1 July 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement for some pupils continues to improve but the rate of improvement is too uneven across the school and for different groups of pupils. For example, pupils in Year 1 are making rapid progress in writing, whereas, in some year groups, pupils' progress is not swift enough. In some year groups, where there are two parallel classes, pupils are making better progress in one class than in the other. The school's own information shows that boys still do not achieve as well as girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Achievement in writing overall is still notably weaker than that in reading and mathematics.

The school's records of pupils' attainment suggest standards for most pupils are in line with those expected for their age, but they do not indicate how many pupils are working at higher levels. Therefore, leaders do not know whether higher-ability pupils are making adequate progress. The work in pupils' books calls into question the accuracy of some of the school's assessment data because it indicates the actual levels pupils are working at are lower than those recorded by the school.

Pupils' writing is now celebrated more widely, such as through attractive displays in corridors. Writing on display generally shows improved quantity and quality.

However, some of this specially presented work contains grammar and spelling errors. Leaders have set clear expectations for how pupils should present their work in writing and mathematics. Pupils know that they should follow these guidelines. Some books are neater as a result. Nevertheless, many pupils' books are still untidy. Some pupils have not kept up with improved presentation because teachers have reverted back to accepting work that includes messy crossings-out or badly formed handwriting. Some pupils are still finding it difficult to write neatly with the pens they are given. As was noted in the previous monitoring visit, some teachers' handwriting in pupils' books is very untidy and does not set a good enough example for pupils to follow. When discussing their books with the inspector, some pupils were unable to read the teacher's comments.

Some pupils are now writing more frequently. This gives them the chance to practise and improve their skills. This is not the case for all pupils. One reason why the school's judgements about writing standards are unreliable is that the limited quantity of pupils' writing in some classes provides too little evidence of pupils' skills to lead to accurate assessment.

A consequence of the emphasis placed on improving presentation – albeit with mixed impact – is that the school has not given sufficient attention to improving pupils' spelling and grammar skills. In Key Stage 2, many pupils' spelling continues to be hindered by the gaps, noted at the previous monitoring visit, in their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Therefore, while spelling lessons are now more active and fun, pupils still make too many basic errors that are not corrected, so their spelling remains weak.

The school library is now more attractive. Leaders report that it is used widely, although this was not evident during this visit. New books have been purchased for classrooms and teachers have given more attention to raising the profile of reading by creating attractive reading corners, teaching pupils about authors, and displaying reviews of books read by pupils. On the whole, classrooms are now more attractive and inviting. The agreed approach to teaching reading is now being used by all teachers. Consequently, pupils in all classes are reading more widely and effectively.

The subject leader for mathematics has given teachers clear guidance about which mathematics' skills pupils should learn in each year group. On the whole, teachers are following this. However, gaps in some pupils' knowledge remain. This prevents them building secure understanding in some aspects of mathematics, such as multiplication and division.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has not improved quickly enough because leaders have not taken the necessary action to address weaknesses. Strengths in teaching identified

at the time of the previous monitoring visit have been sustained. However, expertise has not been shared effectively enough to help to improve other teachers' skills. Teachers in Key Stage 2 have observed good teaching in another school and have reflected on how this experience might improve their practice. All teachers have been trained in ways of making lessons more active. However, leaders have not checked closely enough what difference these actions have made to pupils' achievement. Therefore, while teaching is better in some classes than previously, it is not strong enough to ensure that pupils catch up quickly the ground lost from previous underachievement.

Teachers generally set challenging work for pupils in mathematics. However, this is not so in all classes. Some pupils, whose books show they were able to confidently add three-digit numbers together in September, have been asked to repeat work at a similar level several times since then. Teachers now more frequently plan tasks that require pupils to use number facts to solve simple problems. However, opportunities to explore and investigate mathematically are rare, so pupils' understanding of concepts remains superficial. More-able pupils' books do not show whether these pupils are being taught in ways that sufficiently deepen their understanding or enable them to apply their skills in complex mathematical situations. Sometimes, teachers are so keen to show they are expecting more of their pupils, they set work for some that is too difficult. In one lesson, all the pupils were given the same mathematical puzzle sheet to complete. The most-able pupils found this too easy. The lower-ability pupils did not understand what they had to do, so answered questions incorrectly. Of most concern, is the fact that these answers were ticked by the teacher as being correct. Consequently, the misunderstandings persist for these pupils.

As was reported at the previous monitoring visit, the teaching of phonics to younger pupils now helps them acquire skills at an appropriate rate. However, some older pupils still find reading and spelling difficult because teachers have not addressed the gaps in these pupils' phonic knowledge that resulted from the weak teaching they experienced while in Key Stage 1. This is one reason why pupils' writing standards have improved only slightly. Some teachers have increased the opportunities available for pupils to use writing skills in different subjects and some are now helping pupils to use interesting language. Nevertheless, as noted at the previous monitoring visit, many pupils' writing still lacks a sense of individuality or style. This is partly because these improvements in the teaching of writing are only still at an early stage.

Some pupils have a reasonable understanding of how well they are doing. In some lessons, older pupils make perceptive comments about their own work and that of others. Most pupils know that they have particular targets to achieve in writing and mathematics. Younger pupils can point these out on target cards attached to their books, but sometimes cannot say what they need to do to achieve these targets. Some older pupils could not show the inspector precisely what their current targets

were because the lists in their books did not make this clear. Few pupils spoken to could recall their targets without trying to find them written down, nor could they clearly explain how teachers help them achieve these goals. Therefore, the use of targets is having limited impact on pupils' achievement.

Most teachers frequently write detailed comments in pupils' books when they have finished a piece of work. In the best examples, these comments accurately reflect what the pupil has done well and precisely guide the pupil to make essential improvements to the work. In the very best cases, pupils respond immediately to these suggestions and keep the improvement going in future pieces of work. However, there are marked differences in the impact of teachers' marking between different classes and subjects. For example, some teachers are confident to mark pupils' writing effectively, but do not give the same high-quality guidance when marking mathematics books. Some books show pupils are given little advice, or suggestions that are very general and do not help the pupil know what to do differently. Consequently, these pupils do not make good progress.

These differences remain because the best practice that exists in the school has not been shared constructively. For example, one year group contains the most effective marking in the school in one class and comments that lead to little improvement in the other. Pupils in the latter class explained that they are seldom required to read or respond to what the teacher has written. When asked by the inspector what the comments meant, a more-able pupil and a pupil with special educational needs struggled to read or understand what the teacher had written in their books

The effectiveness of teachers' questioning remains uneven. Some teachers use questions very well to challenge pupils, to check pupils' understanding and to reshape lessons as necessary. Other teachers do not check pupils' learning in lessons and so allow some pupils to carry on with work that is either too hard or too easy.

Parents and pupils continue to enjoy homework tasks. Teachers have maintained the frequency and useful quality of these tasks as reported at the previous monitoring visit.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

On the whole, pupils continue to behave well in lessons. However, during this visit, some disruption to learning was observed where pupils continued talking to one another while the teacher spoke to the whole class. This prevented some pupils from listening to the teacher. This happened because the teacher did not insist on complete attention from all pupils.

On one or two occasions during this visit, some pupils behaved boisterously in cloakrooms and corridors. Some jostled other pupils and shouted loudly. Others ran

noisily through the school. This happened when they were not being directly supervised by an adult.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership structure, new at the time of the previous monitoring visit, still lacks clarity. This is the key barrier to improvement. The issues recorded in the previous report persist: responsibilities overlap between senior leadership and other leaders; lines of reporting and accountability are confused; subject leaders have a more detailed knowledge about the quality of teaching in individual classes than do senior leaders; senior leaders do not use the information gathered by subject leaders to adequately challenge weak performance. In fact, it is not clear what strategic responsibilities are held by senior leaders, as they have had little impact on improving the quality of teaching.

Leaders have not built upon the relative improvements noted at the previous monitoring inspection. This is because senior leaders do not ensure that weaknesses are addressed quickly enough and do not check what difference actions have made to the quality of teaching or pupils' achievement. Actions taken are not always clearly targeted to the right areas. For example, the training on 'active learning', carried out shortly after the previous monitoring visit, was described to the inspector at that time as training to improve teachers' skills in teaching writing. Leaders have not checked whether this training has improved the teaching of writing. Inspection evidence indicates the impact has been mixed.

Targets set for teachers about expected pupils' achievement are still not precise enough to hold teachers sufficiently to account when pupils do not make good progress. As was reported at the previous visit, targets do not require teachers to demonstrate that the most-able pupils achieve well. In addition, targets do not challenge teachers to close gaps between the attainment of groups of pupils, in spite of the persistence of wide differences.

The system for recording pupils' achievement, newly introduced at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, has not been used well to identify and tackle weaknesses in teaching. Leaders at all levels are aware that these records contain inaccurate data because some teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are too generous, yet they have not taken steps to improve the accuracy of these assessments or to address the underachievement that would be indicated by a more accurate set of data. Senior leaders continue to use this inaccurate data as evidence of improving achievement.

Governors' use of the information they receive has continued to improve. Governors demonstrate increasingly effective use of data to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and to ask challenging questions. However, there are still some gaps in

governors' knowledge about the questions they should be asking. This, in conjunction with the low quality of information given to them, hinders the effectiveness of governance. For example, when prompted, governors recognise that the termly information about pupils' achievement does not enable them to challenge the achievement of more-able pupils. Similarly, governors have not been given sufficient information about different leadership roles and responsibilities to have enabled them to identify that the structure is not fit for purpose and that senior leadership continues to be ineffective.

External support

The local authority responded to the concerns identified at the previous monitoring visit by brokering support from the Local Leader in Education and her school. This has led to improvement in the ability of subject leaders to monitor the quality of teaching. Teachers in Key Stage 2 have used visits to the other school to prompt reflection on their own practice. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of support has been limited because senior leaders do not have the capacity to ensure that actions aimed at improving the quality of teaching have the required impact. Little external support has been given to senior leaders to address this weakness.

Governors are working closely with the Diocese of Coventry in the transition to academy status. A timescale has been agreed and parents are being kept well informed. The diocese has a clear plan for building leadership capacity once the transition to academy status is complete. In this interim period, the diocese and the local authority have not worked cohesively to secure continuation of the tentative improvements observed at the previous visit.

HMI strongly recommends that the local authority and diocese work closely together to ensure the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures by the time of the next monitoring visit.