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6 March 2015

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

Dear Miss Warnock

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

Following my visit to your school on 4 and 5 March 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 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, 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 March 2015

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, English and mathematics subject leaders, all members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. I also met with the headteacher of Joy Lane Primary School who is supporting the school. I visited 14 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher, and looked at the work in pupils' books. I attended an assembly and had lunch with pupils. I paid a very brief visit to a mathematics workshop for parents and carers.

Context

Two teachers left the school at the end of the autumn term and one teacher joined the school in January. One of the assistant headteachers, who is also the inclusion manager, is absent due to ill health.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There are regular checks on how well pupils are achieving in reading, writing and mathematics. These have been moderated by colleagues in other schools and local authority advisors to make sure they are accurate. The most recent information shows that pupils in the early years are making good progress. I observed children keen to learn and making rapid progress in a mathematics session. They counted to 20 and back and some counted in twos. Several confidently read and followed instructions which required them to use their knowledge of the properties of two dimensional shapes, such as triangles and rectangles. In the rest of the school, the pace of progress is beginning to improve and standards are rising. For example, about seven more Year 3 pupils are now reading at the standard expected for their age than was the case in September.

The rate of improvement is variable in different classes and subjects, with weaknesses in Year 1 pupils' reading skills and writing in Years 4 and 5. The pupils' books show that they are trying to use more interesting vocabulary and ideas in their writing but they are not writing enough. They have too few opportunities to write at length and develop their confidence and fluency in handwriting style, spelling and grammar. Expectations are rising and the most able pupils are more effectively challenged. The pace of improvement is not yet fast enough for older pupils to make up the ground lost by previous poor teaching and low expectations in the past.

The most recent checks on how well pupils are learning have been very carefully analysed to identify which groups of pupils are making the least progress. This analysis shows that pupils with special educational needs, some of whom are also disadvantaged pupils, are making inadequate progress. In a few particular cases,

there is not the specialist expertise in the school to adequately meet their needs. However, the additional provision in the school is not effective for most of this group, and changes in approach are required so that their needs can be better met.

The quality of teaching

Whole-school training and individual coaching is having a positive impact so that the quality of teaching is improving. Just over half of the teaching is consistently good and the rest requires improvement. There is now very little inadequate practice. This improving picture is beginning to result in improvements in pupils' learning.

Classrooms are bright and well organised, with helpful displays and resources that support learning. Relationships are positive. Most adults use the school's agreed systems and manage behaviour well. Pupils, particularly the youngest, are keen to listen, join in and to learn. Any off-task behaviour is usually directly linked to weaker teaching. The quality of teachers' planning is also improving so that teachers now take into account the different abilities of most pupils. This includes making sure there is better challenge for the most able pupils. However, planning and the quality of teaching are not effective in meeting the needs of the least able pupils.

Some teachers' expectations about how much pupils can achieve are still too low. Where pupils do not learn quickly enough, the pace is slow, pupils are not given enough opportunities, nor are they expected, to complete sufficient work. This is particularly noticeable in writing where there are many very short, often unfinished, pieces of work. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and generally give helpful guidance so that pupils know what to do to improve their work. Sometimes pupils are given time to respond to the marking and also to review their partners' work. This is only effective if they have had enough time or are expected to complete enough work, otherwise there is insufficient work for the teachers' comments to be useful. Sometimes activities are not explained clearly enough so pupils are confused about what they need to do to achieve success. At other times, the activities fill up time but do not result in learning, for example, when pupils carry out an activity in a reading session which does not require them to read.

The teaching of early reading and phonics is well organised with smooth transitions between groups and activities. This is an important improvement and pupils are using their phonics skills more confidently to read and write. However, the pace of learning in these sessions is too slow and there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their skills in other lessons. This means that overall reading and writing are not improving as quickly as they should, particularly in Year 1.

Where learning is more effective, teachers have a good understanding of the subject and know how to question, challenge, probe and move the learning along. For example, in the music lessons observed during the visit, the teacher's understanding, confident use of technical terms and enthusiasm kept pupils' engrossed and helped them to make rapid progress in a relatively short time.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

These are the aspects where there are the most obvious and notable improvements. Pupils are helpful and friendly. They behave well in assemblies, in lessons and when moving around the school. The building work is almost complete and this has contributed to a sense of calm as lessons are no longer accompanied by the sound of hammers and drills. The systems for managing behaviour are being used by almost all the adults and the pupils respond well to this consistency of approach. The school is a calmer, safer and happier place as the systems and routines become more settled and behaviour improves.

There are very rigorous systems for tracking incidents of poor behaviour, analysing trends and taking action as a result of particular concerns. Pupils who find it difficult to manage their emotions and behaviour are responding well to additional support. As a result, the number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced. For some pupils and class groups there have been significant improvements. For example, the number of incidents for groups of pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 has dropped from 150 in the first term to 36 in the third term.

More pupils arrive every day, on time and ready to learn. Attendance over this year has improved to just below average. The reason that it remains below average is because there are still too many pupils who take too many odd days off. School leaders are working very hard to address this problem because these pupils are missing out on the improving education provided by the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

School leaders, and in particular the headteacher, are much more confident, clear-sighted and purposeful. This growing confidence and understanding of the importance of fun and enjoyment in education was evident during the visit when almost everyone dressed up as the character Wally from the storybooks. Not so much a case of 'Where's Wally' but where isn't Wally!

In the absence of the inclusion manager, the headteacher has really got to grips with the school's provision for pupils with additional needs. She has carefully analysed which groups are making inadequate progress and why. There is a strong sense that leaders know each pupil much better now and are holding teachers more to account for making sure that all pupils in their classes are achieving as well as possible.

The leaders know the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and are proactive in providing support and challenge when necessary. Each teacher has a plan with targets for improvement. The capacity of leadership has been reduced due to the absence of one senior leader and because the other assistant headteacher has had to spend most of her time teaching the Year 3 class due to difficulties in recruitment. However, to compensate for this, the leaders are very open to, and

increasingly able to direct, external support to those areas where it is most needed. For example, colleagues from Joy Lane Primary School make a valuable contribution to the coaching and mentoring of inexperienced staff.

Leaders have reviewed their improvement plans and sharpened the focus onto particular weaknesses highlighted by a recent local authority review of teaching and learning. The early years leader knows exactly how well the younger children are learning and her action plans are tightly focused on improving weaker aspects. The pastoral leader is also able to show very clearly how her actions are resulting in improvements in behaviour and attendance. Leaders of English and mathematics carry out checks on the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. They are more experienced in their roles now and increasingly influential. For example, they provide training and support for their colleagues. Nonetheless, they focus too much on teaching rather than checking to make sure that all the hard work is making enough difference to pupils' learning. Although their improvement plans show the actions that will be taken, not all of them are specific enough about what success should look like in terms of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills.

The IEB members strengthen leadership and management by bringing valuable experience, skills and time. They have a good understanding of where the school is now, what is improving and what still needs to be done.

External support

The relationships between the school, the local authority, the partner school, the diocese and the IEB are positive and productive. Joy Lane colleagues provide regular coaching and mentoring. Local authority staff contribute to monitoring and evaluation activities. As a result, there is a reduced chance of mixed messages or confusion. Representatives of each key group have started meeting regularly to review the school's progress and clarify the next steps. This is an important step forward and means that all are working cohesively to achieve improvement. The school also collaborates with a group of local schools and has been working together with them to implement new assessment and curriculum arrangements.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency the school should speed up the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs by improving the quality of teaching for these pupils.