

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9158
Direct email: rachel.dayan@serco.com



19 March 2015

Jonathan Jones
Headteacher
Castlechurch Primary School
Tennyson Road
Stafford
ST17 9SY

Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Castlechurch Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Le Breuilly, Additional Inspector, and Rashida Din, to your school on 17–18 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 March 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 appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. Appointments may be made to Key Stage 1.

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 Staffordshire Local Authority.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority
cc. The Secretary of State

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by making sure that all teachers:
 - take account of what pupils already know and can do when teaching, especially more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and the quality of work that they produce
 - provide pupils with precise guidance on how to improve their work.

- Raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by insisting that teachers:
 - make sure pupils read frequently and support them to develop their fluency and understanding
 - teach pupils how to spell correctly, use grammar and punctuation appropriately and write legibly
 - expect pupils to solve harder mathematical problems
 - make sure pupils use and extend their reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge in different subjects.

- Ensure that all leaders and managers:
 - use accurate information on how well different groups of pupils are doing to compare their progress and provide additional support where needed
 - undertake training to develop the skills they need to check carefully the quality of teaching and pupils' learning
 - contribute to school development plans that identify clearly and specifically what improvements are needed and how they will be achieved, who is going to monitor the actions and how the impact of the actions will be assessed.

- Make sure that governors develop their skills so that they can hold leaders and managers to account for pupils' progress.

An external review of governance and the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17–18 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, the special educational needs coordinator, the Chair, Vice-Chair and representative of the Governing Body, a Local Leader of Education, a School Improvement Partner from Entrust and the commissioning manager for local authority school improvement. Inspectors held discussions with pupils, observed lessons and looked at pupils' work in books and displays.

Context

The deputy headteacher and a special educational needs coordinator took up their posts in January 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's current data indicate pupils in Years 1, 2, 3 and 6 are making good progress in reading and mathematics. Pupils in Year 4 are making expected progress in all subjects. Pupils' progress in Year 5 since September is slow in writing and mathematics but leaders believe that the assessments made at the end of the previous year were too positive. Assessments are now accurate and validated by external agencies.

All pupils read to an adult in school at least once a week. Pupils enjoy reading and they appreciate their weekly visits to the school library. However, pupils do not read widely enough for enjoyment, interest or investigation. Book corners in some classrooms are untidy and uninviting. By contrast, others celebrate authors, remind pupils of reading skills and display fiction and non-fiction books, inviting pupils' curiosity. Pupils read with reasonable fluency and are usually able to apply their knowledge of phonics (the sounds letters make) to read unfamiliar words. They listen carefully as adults precisely demonstrate sounds, blends or words and accurately copy the adults in their pronunciation. The rates of children's progress in Reception have accelerated in reading because phonics is taught systematically, regularly and developmentally. These skills are practised and applied in children's writing, which also provides evidence of quickened progress. The Nursery classes have been slow to adopt these successful approaches to teaching and learning and, consequently, they are at an early stage of improvement.

Pupils are taught spelling, grammar and handwriting skills every day. Spelling is improving over time; common errors are reducing and unfamiliar words are attempted logically as pupils apply their phonic or spelling knowledge. Although handwriting is practised daily, teachers' expectations of pupils' written presentation

are not always high enough and inconsistencies persist in letter formation. Learned skills are not always applied in all written work and across all subjects.

Pupils learn an appropriate breadth of mathematical concepts for their age and ability. They have regular opportunities to solve mathematical problems in real contexts. The recently acquired published schemes continue to provide suitable developmental structure for pupils to broaden their mathematical knowledge and deepen their understanding. In some classes, there are too few opportunities for pupils to learn practical mathematical skills and apply them in real-life situations; for example, measuring and weighing.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and disadvantaged pupils, receive additional targeted support, often in small groups. Pupils are acquiring the necessary methods to tackle unfamiliar words and they enjoy practising their new skills and tackling increasingly difficult words. They are reminded about the necessary expression to reflect different punctuation and they respond eagerly with increased precision. These pupils are making progress but from low starting points. Pupils make less progress when adults require them to practise particular tasks without ensuring the pupils' understanding. For example, a group of four pupils were required to identify parts of speech for given words. They guessed until they arrived at the right answer. They were unable to select knowledgeably because they had not been taught the necessary information to accurately fulfil the task. In these situations, pupils fail to make the necessary progress and a lack of understanding persists.

The quality of teaching

Many of the weaknesses identified in the previous monitoring inspection have been addressed and improvements made. Teachers are increasingly confident in teaching mathematics and English in accordance with the new National Curriculum. Teachers extend mathematical problem-solving activities so that pupils apply their knowledge in a variety of imaginative contexts. Unfortunately, some tasks are not sufficiently rooted in mathematical concepts. For example, in one lesson seen, pupils were asked to imagine the equipment they needed for an expedition. They were then expected to estimate the cost of such equipment. A pupil correctly observed that they did not have the information necessary to realistically estimate the cost. Where learning is more successful, teachers apply their own accurate subject knowledge to plan appropriate tasks for the pupils' abilities. Their clear explanations ensure pupils' understanding. Teachers encourage pupils to discuss different methods of calculation so they build up a bank of strategies to find solutions to mathematical calculations.

The Reception classes are very well organised and adults plan purposeful activities which consolidate children's knowledge and newly taught skills. Adults are deployed well to ensure that they build children's subject-related vocabulary and concepts. In

one lesson, children were introduced to two-dimensional shapes. They practised recognising and naming different shapes and then went on to sharply focused activities with adult support to identify, name and explore the different features of shapes. The planned tasks correctly extended children's mathematical language and deepened their understanding for the different shapes. In another group, children cut out shapes, discussed their properties and then explored how they could create new shapes by folding the paper in different ways. This approach enabled well-focused learning where all tasks consolidated the taught concepts while the children still had fun.

Children in the Nursery class are becoming more self-reliant and responsible for their own organisation. When preparing for a walk in the school grounds, they were able to take off their shoes and put on wellington boots and coats with the minimum of assistance. However, those children enjoying snacks had their drinks and food given to them and cleared up after them rather than developing their own skills in laying a table, pouring and handing out drinks, preparing food and putting away cups and plates. Children are increasingly able to express themselves; for example, a group of children recognised and named objects taken from a bag in preparation for an imaginary sleepover. They gave reasons for packing each object. The children spoke in full explanatory sentences; for example, 'He has to brush his teeth before going to bed.' Teachers have recently introduced the children to reading and writing skills. They practise letter formation but the basic skills of holding pencils, assisted letter formation and precise mark making have not been taught. As a consequence, children do not adopt the necessary precision, and bad habits are quickly established.

Teachers' plans are rooted in pupils' progress. They work to ensure pupils learn appropriate skills, broaden their knowledge and deepen their understanding. They know they are accountable for pupils' progress and they are keen to keep track of all pupils so that difficulties can be identified quickly and rectified. They are suitably aware of historical gaps in pupils' knowledge and they are determined to speed up the rates of pupils' progress. Reading lessons are purposeful and focused on developing skills or developing essential vocabulary for understanding and application in writing.

Pupils say they find teachers' written feedback helpful. In most classes, marking provides a suitable balance of praise and how learned skills can be improved. However, teachers do not ensure that pupils respond to their feedback; for example, by correcting errors or practising skills further.

Teaching assistants are more effectively deployed and their individual expertise is developing. Occasionally, assistants do not utilise their skills to support small groups of pupils as well as individuals.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say they feel safe in school. They report that behaviour has improved and they are able to get on with their work without distraction. Pupils work collaboratively during lessons and willingly share ideas. During playtimes and lunchtime breaks, pupils play cooperatively or settle with friends to chat. Pupils appreciate the resources available at lunchtimes but report that there are not enough to go round. Year 6 pupils take it in turns to help supervise younger pupils during lunchtimes. They take their duties seriously and genuinely look out for younger pupils, help them in their routines and assist them to play cooperatively and safely. All breaks are suitably supervised. However, pupils explained that their concerns are not always taken seriously by lunchtime supervisors and therefore their reports are not followed up or appropriate action taken. The responsibilities of lunchtime supervisors are unclear, particularly with regards to their accountability for ensuring good levels of behaviour during lunchtime. The pupils are uncertain whether to report to supervisors or teachers. Records of misbehaviour are kept but leaders do not examine and analyse these regularly to identify trends and solutions.

Staff appropriately follow up pupil absences and involve external agencies where necessary. Attendance has improved but the full range of sanctions has not yet been adopted where a small number of pupils are persistently absent.

The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and clearly outlines the procedures for keeping children safe. The procedures and records regarding staff recruitment are thorough and include references and checks on qualifications. All staff have regular safeguarding training.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Following the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher acted quickly to review the roles and responsibilities of all staff. All staff now have job descriptions and suitable levels of responsibility. Leaders have provided substantial support and training for all staff. They have communicated higher expectations of others and have forged a strong sense of teamwork. All staff share a sense of ambition, purpose and direction. Leaders have increased the level of challenge where staff do not improve quickly enough. Teachers have additional planning time but leaders make it clear that better-quality plans are expected in return.

Leaders acknowledge that targeted support for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs was not planned speedily enough in the past. Following a review of pupil premium provision in November last year, leaders reorganised support for pupils so that their subject-specific needs were met more precisely. Leaders remain realistic about the rate at which gaps will close between these pupils and other pupils in school and nationally by the end of the school year.

A special educational needs coordinator was appointed in January this year. She has the National Award in Special Educational Needs Coordination. The coordinator has compared the progress of those pupils who have special educational needs with other pupils and drawn up suitable plans to bring about improvements. She has reviewed staff responsibilities and is updating the special educational needs policy to ensure it reflects closely the requirements of the *SEND Code of Practice 2014*.

The roles of subject and phase leaders are now established and they increasingly reinforce higher expectations of teachers. They keep a close eye on pupil progress data and are developing analytical skills to identify successes and barriers. They prepare reports for governors to account for the actions taken and future developments needed. These reports do not yet provide a quantifiable or qualitative measure of impact.

Long-term strategic planning has been put on hold while short-term speedy developments were implemented, revised and improved. Planned actions are suitably focused on the priority areas of raising standards, improving teaching and devolving responsibilities with suitable accountability. Plans clearly indicate expected developments over a period of four terms. Leaders at all levels, including governors, are ready to consider more long-term goals and plan strategically towards their successful achievement. For example, the school's promotion of democracy and preparation for life in modern Britain is unclear. The implementation of the new National Curriculum and methods of assessing pupils' progress is at an early stage of development. Curriculum plans do not provide a clear steer to develop pupils' understanding, tolerance and respect for different beliefs, faiths, religions and customs. Training for raising awareness of radicalisation and extremism is planned for this week.

Governors continue to develop their roles and closely monitor the school's progress. They have taken full advantage of the support provided by the School Improvement Partner and they are in the process of writing a governor handbook. Individual governors work closely with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to track the progress of pupils and evaluate the effectiveness of support for groups of pupils. They know the areas for future development and show a dogged determination in achieving improvements quickly and securely. They have raised their own expectations and levels of challenge, as seen in the targets set for the headteacher.

External support

Commissioned support from Entrust provides regular, detailed evaluations, training and coaching for specific subjects, phases and leaders. The subject specialists provide detailed support and work with leaders and managers to secure developments.

The Local Leader of Education provided valuable support in preparing phase coordinators for their roles. She shared good practice and helped them to develop the necessary skills to monitor, review, plan and evaluate their work.

The local authority has kept close contact with the school and knows the school well. Support has been commissioned appropriately and the local authority has a clear view of the school's future developments needed.