

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566863

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jbenett@cfbt.com



26 March 2015

Mrs Judith Reay

Executive Headteacher

Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Whitfield

Northumberland

NE47 8JH

Dear Mrs Reay

Special measures monitoring inspection of Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit with Claire Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 25 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 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 Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Health Service for Northumberland and the Director of Education for the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle.

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by: eradicating any inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that the development of children's skills, knowledge and understanding are assessed and recorded accurately when they start the school and their progress is carefully tracked so that their next steps of learning build well upon what they already know and can do
 - making sure teachers plan activities which provide challenge for all groups of pupils, including those of varying ages and abilities
 - providing opportunities for the teachers to share and learn from the very best teaching practices in other schools
 - ensuring that the role of teaching assistants in lessons is always clear and that their skills are developed so they can help pupils to learn effectively
 - making sure teachers make the best use of time in lessons to promote learning
 - ensuring teachers provide regular feedback to pupils in lessons and through marking and that pupils are able to respond in a way that promotes their learning
 - ensuring teachers provide pupils with more challenging and exciting work that maintains their interest so that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are always good.
- Ensure that pupils make at least good progress in reading, writing and in mathematics, so that they reach above average levels of attainment by the time they leave the school by:
 - improving pupils' understanding of letters and the sounds they make and older pupils' skills in understanding what they have read
 - making sure pupils' number skills are developed progressively
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in extended pieces of writing
 - ensuring handwriting is taught regularly and pupils are encouraged to write and present their work neatly.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that teaching and learning are checked more rigorously and that feedback to staff about how to improve their teaching and pupils' learning is clear and acted upon
 - establishing links with successful schools in the area in order to improve the skills of leaders to drive improvement
 - improving the tracking of pupils' progress so that the achievement of different groups of pupils can be identified more swiftly and the necessary support put in place to prevent them from falling behind

- making sure that leaders and governors fully understand what progress pupils are capable of and what constitutes good progress for pupils given their individual starting points
- improving the governing body's knowledge of the school's work, its strengths and weaknesses so that they can hold leaders to account for their performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

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 may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 25 March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior teacher, a group of staff, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a group of pupils from across the school. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority and a consultant headteacher working on behalf of the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited four lessons to observe teaching and speak to pupils informally about their learning. Two of these were conducted jointly with the headteacher. HMI also scrutinised the current standard of work in pupils' books, alongside the headteacher and senior teacher, to gauge the accuracy of assessment and evaluate the quality of teaching over time. A wide range of documents were evaluated, including the school's analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress and the most recent records of the checks made on the quality of teaching.

Context

The local authority issued a warning notice to the governing body in February 2015 due to concerns about the lack of progress being made by the school. The executive headteacher now spends four days per week at Whitfield. The senior teacher in the early years and Key Stage 1 class becomes the teacher-in-charge for the remaining day each week. The federated governing body is undergoing reconstitution which will be completed by the end of July 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Leaders have been unable to reverse the long trend of underachievement so that pupils continue to make slow progress in their learning. Achievement in mathematics is of particular concern. School data, work in pupils' books and discussions with leaders confirm that, across the spring term, over half of the pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 did not make any progress in mathematics. While the proportion of pupils making expected progress is greater in reading and writing, too few pupils make the swifter progress needed overall to raise attainment rapidly and enable them to reach at least national expectations by the end of each key stage. Given that children arrive at the school with skills and abilities that are at least typical for their age, with many above what is typical, pupils remain far from reaching their true potential.

Fundamental weaknesses in the assessment of pupils' work persist. The measures used by leaders to judge the progress of pupils and, in turn, the effectiveness of their actions continue to be inaccurate, especially in Key Stage 2. Joint activities during inspection revealed to leaders the wide discrepancies still evident between the levels assigned to pupils' writing and the quality of their actual work. While external verification of teachers' assessments has been sought through an

independent consultant, staff have not received training to support them in conducting this moderation process themselves. Tracking data is therefore unreliable and teaching lacks precision because staff believe pupils are making greater progress and reaching higher standards than is the case.

Pupils' progress in learning letters and the sounds they make (phonics) shows stronger signs of improvement. Reception-aged children, in particular, enjoy the opportunity to learn new sounds each day and practise their reading. Such focused, structured work is also having a more positive impact on their confidence to write. For example, the youngest children were seen to be composing imaginative and elaborate sentences, undeterred by the challenge of writing tricky words.

The quality of teaching

Leaders do not have an accurate view of the quality of teaching; it is not improving at an appropriate pace to ensure pupils make up for the lost ground of previous years. The fundamental skills of teaching require urgent attention, most notably in Key Stage 2. The questioning of pupils is particularly weak. Too often teachers use questioning as a means of checking whether a pupil has been paying attention rather than as a way of assessing their understanding. Teachers do not take heed of pupils' responses to adjust their teaching accordingly.

The persistent inaccuracies in assessment continue to compound the difficulties faced by teachers in delivering lessons that are pitched at precisely the right level for pupils' current stage of learning. More often than not, pupils find their work too easy, so that time is wasted covering material they have already mastered, or too hard, so that they become frustrated and switch off. When teaching fails to meet the needs of pupils in this way, they lose concentration and their rate of learning suffers because they choose other, less productive activities to occupy their time.

Children in the early years do not receive their full entitlement to a qualified teacher; most of their time is spent under the guidance of a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA). While the HLTA has ensured children are making better progress in their early reading and writing skills, opportunities to develop children's independence, cooperation and decision making skills are limited because they do not get regular enough opportunities to choose activities for themselves and initiate their own learning.

The focus on providing quality feedback to pupils through the marking of their work has continued. Pupils particularly appreciate the comments and level they receive on their piece of 'Friday writing'; an opportunity they are afforded every week to write for a sustained period of time. However, pupils say the marking of their other work is less useful because it does not always provide them with the help and support they need to learn from their mistakes and make further progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leaders have implemented a package of 'non-negotiables' relating to pupils' behaviour. Greater understanding of what is acceptable conduct in school has led to a further reduction in the incidence of poor behaviour. Assemblies are being used as a useful mechanism for reinforcing expectations of behaviour and rewarding those who have adhered to the rules. Pupils are increasingly rising to these higher expectations so that communal time and learning in classrooms becomes less disrupted.

Attendance has improved. Clearer channels of communication with parents, such as through the school newsletter, have raised the profile of attendance and reinforced the negative impact on learning when pupils are absent unnecessarily. Pupils themselves are more motivated to come to school because they are incentivised by more frequent whole-school rewards.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders do not possess the necessary skills to bring about the improvements to teaching and achievement that are, by now, so urgently needed. Despite the increased leadership presence of the headteacher, the vital systems and processes for improvement remain ineffective and a significant number of issues, identified over one year ago, persist.

Leaders do not hold staff to account for the progress their pupils make. The link between monitoring and evaluation, the professional development of staff and the subsequent impact on pupils' progress is weak. Although the frequency of monitoring has increased, lesson observations, work scrutiny and data analysis do not yield the useful information they should because leaders are not focused in their approach. Leaders themselves recognise that work scrutiny is under-used as a mechanism for evaluating the quality of teaching over time. Lesson observations are equally ineffective. Opportunities to judge the progress pupils make within a lesson are missed so that the strengths and weaknesses of teaching are superficial. As a result, feedback to staff is not firmly rooted in the difference their work is making to pupils' learning. HMI found little evidence to indicate that any weaknesses identified from monitoring were being followed up swiftly by leaders.

The quality of governance is developing but the continued weaknesses in assessment and the lack of cross-referencing by leaders between achievement data, work in pupils' books and the rate of learning and progress within lessons has given governors a false and overly-optimistic view of how quickly the school is improving. Governors are aware that they are too reliant on the information provided by the headteacher and will need to commission further external scrutiny and validation to ensure a more accurate picture of the school's overall performance. Many governors

are keen to shadow these activities within school so that they too can learn to be more vigilant of the signs of slower progress.

The Chair of the Governing Body responded quickly and decisively to the warning notice served by the local authority. The leadership presence of the headteacher has increased and greater support for teaching has been secured from the Diocese and the local authority. Governors who are members of the steering group committee have raised their game in holding leaders to account for the progress pupils make. While they are now asking more pertinent questions about the effectiveness of chosen strategies and the difference these are making to teaching and pupils' achievement, their analysis is based on flawed data and does not make as much of a difference as it should. A National Leader of Governance (NLG) has recently been commissioned to support the further development of the governing body, especially as it reconstitutes to become a smaller, more sharply focused group.

External support

The local authority responded quickly to the outcomes of the last monitoring visit and issued a warning notice to the governing body. Increased support from senior local authority officers has initially focused on making adaptations to the school action plan so that it is now a more useful tool for improvement. Local authority lead officers for assessment have supported staff in securing the accuracy of their judgements but this has not upskilled teachers sufficiently well to undertake moderation activities on their own so that the overall quality of this support has been ineffective. Leaders are still reliant on external verification to ensure assessment information is robust. The steering group continues to meet regularly to evaluate the journey of the school but the minutes of these meetings show that there remains insufficient focus, during discussion, on the precise impact of leaders' actions.

The Diocese has brokered support from an external consultant in North Tyneside to validate assessments. There is now an accurate baseline from the end of the autumn term from which leaders can confidently measure progress in the coming terms. Staff have also been afforded the opportunity to visit Benton Dene Primary, an outstanding school, to observe and share best practice. Staff have appreciated this opportunity and would welcome more regular visits to improve their teaching. The headteacher now needs the same level of support, including through close partnership working with outstanding leaders, to ensure she has the essential skills needed to take the school forward.