

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

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

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

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Mrs A Anderton
The Headteacher
St James Church of England Junior School
Upton Street
Gloucester
Gloucestershire
GL1 4JU

Dear Mrs Anderton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St James Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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, we are 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 s5 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 and the Diocese of Gloucester.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by ensuring teachers:
 - plan learning activities that make pupils of all abilities think hard, especially the more able
 - provide effective support for those pupils who need specific extra help, especially those with special educational needs
 - do not talk for too long and allow pupils to start their work promptly so they can find things out for themselves
 - explain to pupils what they need to do to be successful in lessons and in order to produce their best work.
- Improve pupils' achievement, especially in writing, by:
 - providing more opportunities to for pupils to write at length in order to practise and extend their writing skills
 - making sure teachers demonstrate to pupils what they need to do to develop their writing skills
 - teaching pupils higher-level reading skills such as inference and deduction
 - giving pupils sufficient opportunities to respond to their marking and make the necessary improvements to their work.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that improvement plans have precise targets for pupils' progress and for improving the quality of teaching, and that they are implemented effectively and checked regularly
 - setting clear expectations and guidance for teachers about what is expected in lessons and checking robustly that they are being followed
 - establishing an efficient and effective system for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils
 - carrying out an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
 - developing the skills and knowledge of the governing body to enable governors to check the school's work for themselves more effectively.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 24 and 24 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. She met with the headteacher and the other members of the senior leadership team. Specific meetings were held with the leaders for literacy and the special educational needs coordinator. Other meetings focused on the use of the pupil premium, the curriculum and the school's current assessment data. Discussions were also conducted with a parent, four members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority. The inspector undertook visits to six lessons and one group of pupils receiving extra support with their writing. The latter and two lessons were joint observations with subject leaders or the headteacher. In addition, a range of pupils' books in Years 3, 4 and 5 were scrutinised, in class, during the afternoon lessons.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupil performance and progress is now far more consistent in all classes and year groups. Staff and pupils have rallied together, working hard to do their best and drive up standards. As a result of the amount of catching-up that older pupils have needed to do, predictions based on current school data show that pupils in Year 6 will attain similar standards to the previous year's. Given previous gaps in their knowledge and understanding, this represents good progress for this group of pupils overall. However, some groups of pupils are still not achieving at the level they should. For example, pupils in Year 5 have not made the same amount of progress as in other year groups; this is because the work given to them in the past has often been too easy. In some year groups and in some subjects, the gaps between those pupils entitled to the pupil premium and their classmates has grown, but generally they are reducing. Not enough of the more able pupils are reaching their potential. The school is aware of these pockets of underperformance and has robust plans to resolve this inequality.

The increased use of discussion and identification with pupils' shared experiences has significantly improved pupils' progress in English. Since September 2014, in writing there has been a 50% increase of pupils in Year 3, and 60% in Year 6, being on track to reach their challenging end-of-year target, with 40% and 70% respectively for reading.

The new mathematics scheme mentioned in the last monitoring visit in December 2014, along with better teaching, is helping pupils to make better progress in mathematics than previously. Investment in a wider range of practical apparatus is enabling pupils to visualise mathematical problems through experimentation, which is helping them to acquire a greater mastery of mathematical ideas. This is clearly demonstrated in Year 4, where significant progress has been made in pupils'

mathematics knowledge and understanding, with a 40% increase in the number of pupils now on track to make their challenging end-of-year targets.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is now more consistent and the extra support given to some staff has helped them improve their practice. Consequently, more pupils are now making better progress in all subjects. The marking of pupils' work has improved and teachers are following the school's policies more systematically. There is also a more consistent use of time given in class and a greater emphasis on supporting pupils to make the necessary improvements to their work. This has increased the level of pride that pupils take in their writing. It is also enabling them to have a better dialogue about their learning with staff so that they are being more successful in lessons and producing better work.

Following external advice and support, along with internal coaching and sharing best practice, several teachers have changed the way they teach. In Year 3, pupils' progress in mathematics has also improved because the school has introduced specific interventions that are helping staff to unpick individual pupils' misconceptions. The close working partnership between Year 3 teachers and mathematical consultants is enabling the school to identify the best and quickest ways to remedy any misunderstandings and gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Schools trips to a waterpark and a Roman museum and activities such as cooking, raft-building and the visiting 'Science dome' are successfully used by staff as a stimulus for conversation. As a result, pupils share their different ideas and gain a greater understanding of the world around them. This has helped them to develop their speaking and listening skills. Following these experiences, pupils are given real purposes and reasons for writing at length across different subjects, which they are enjoying. The school is aware that more attention needs to be given to planning for higher-level reading skills such as inference and deduction throughout the curriculum.

At the last monitoring visit, in some classes there were too many blank pages in pupils' 'writing' and science books. Consequently, it was not evident that pupils who had been absent had caught up missed work. This has been rectified. There are very few blank pages in pupils' books, and where they exist it is because a pupil has accidentally 'skipped' a page. Spaces have been left in books so that work that is currently on the wall can be kept safely for future reference. These spaces are clearly indicated so that pupils will know where to insert their work after the display has finished.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to behave well. They are kind and friendly to one another. They are good at taking turns and listen well to each other's opinions.

Through a school survey, pupils reported that they like the new 'online reading club'. Because some of the pupils do not have access to this facility at home, the school has provided more opportunities for pupils to access this at lunchtimes. Pupils greatly appreciate this.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and managers are determined that pupils should have 'quality first teaching' so that there is little need for 'catch-up' or 'booster' intervention work. High quality work is expected of all staff; they know this and the quality of provision in lessons has improved with teachers and teaching assistants working more closely together. The leaders for different aspects of the school's work continue to demonstrate their enthusiasm and determination to enable pupils to do their best. They have grown in stature within the school community and are taking a more active role in monitoring pupils' work in lessons and pupils' books. They are working in an effective collaboration with each other.

Pupil performance data is now far more accurate and shared with school staff. Each area leader has a good understanding of the data and there is now a common reporting format. Using this data, the headteacher and area leaders are focussing their attention where improvements are needed most, for example the widening progress gaps for those pupils entitled to the pupil premium compared with their classmates, particularly in Year 4 writing and in Year 6 mathematics. As a result, governors and members of the project group are now more effective in holding the school leaders to account for pupils' achievement and the actions the school is taking to ensure the removal of special measures.

The school improvement plan is considerably improved, although there are still some tasks that should be given to people other than the headteacher to complete. The school's website has also improved so that it is more helpful to parents and attractive, although this remains very much a work in progress.

Governors have aligned themselves to different areas of the school's work. They are visiting the school more frequently in order to see the school's activities in these specific areas on a day-to-day basis. They are beginning to use this knowledge and their regular discussions with the leading staff to have a better strategic vision for their given area of responsibility. Those pupils who have special educational needs or English as an additional language, or who are experiencing difficulties, are benefiting from the exchange of information. The school is in a better position to ensure families get additional help from other services when they need it. In

addition, the curriculum is adapted better and more quickly to meet the pupils' specific needs.

External support

Senior leaders have created good external alliances and support networks that are increasing the opportunity for all staff to see what other schools are doing. They are sharing best practice within the school following training events they have attended. Good professional development, training and coaching have been provided by external consultants.

The school is moderating the work that pupils produce with other schools to check its quality and accuracy. In addition, the local authority has ensured that the school's data are accurate and has provided good advice and support.