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31 March 2015

Ms Alison Hatch
The Headteacher
Cranbrook Church of England Primary School
Carriers Road
Cranbrook
Kent, TN17 3JZ

Dear Ms Hatch

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cranbrook Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Julie Sackett, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 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 one newly qualified teacher 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 Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and improve its quality so it is at least good, to rapidly raise pupils' achievement, especially in reading and mathematics, by making sure that:
 - teachers use assessment information accurately to plan lessons that are hard enough for all groups of pupils, especially the most able, so they can achieve at the highest levels
 - teachers assess pupils' progress more effectively in lessons and then adapt work more quickly when necessary so pupils remain engaged and all behave well
 - teachers' marking always gives pupils a clear understanding of what they need to do next and pupils have time to respond to this feedback and correct their work
 - activities in the Reception class are purposeful and allow children to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics, when working on their own or with adults
 - the good practice seen in some lessons is shared more effectively among the staff.
- Improve behaviour so that it is at least good by ensuring that:
 - adults who supervise playtimes and lunchtimes implement the behaviour policy more consistently so pupils' behaviour improves
 - all instances of reported bullying are followed up thoroughly and monitored closely to prevent them from reoccurring and to reassure parents and pupils.
- Develop the skills of leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, by:
 - making sure that the quality of teaching is rigorously checked using information from work scrutiny, assessment information and lesson observations to secure judgements
 - creating and implementing accurate improvement plans, especially for English and mathematics, that are clearly focused on pupils' learning with time-limited, measurable outcomes for success so pupils' progress is improved
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so they can be effective in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in their areas of responsibility
 - providing high-quality professional development to improve the teaching of mathematics and to support those teachers whose practice is not yet good
 - rapidly implementing the performance management policy and setting targets for teachers that are closely linked to pupils' progress and achievement
 - developing partnerships with local schools that will enable teachers and leaders at all levels to observe good practice and improve their skills
 - ensuring governors gather more detailed and accurate information about the school's performance so they are better able to challenge and support the school's leaders.

An external review of governance to include a specific focus on 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally to parents at the beginning of the school day. Inspectors observed seven lessons, all of which were seen jointly with senior staff.

Aspects of safeguarding were checked. Inspectors looked at a selection of books from children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and from pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6. Inspectors also spoke to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes and heard some pupils read.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the interim headteacher has been appointed as the substantive headteacher. The leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 has been promoted to the post of deputy headteacher. The temporary teacher in Year 5 has been replaced by a substantive teacher who has additional responsibility as the English and Key Stage 2 leader.

A learning behaviour mentor joined the school in January to lead changes to the school's behaviour policy and practices. The chief executive officer of BrookLearning Trust, a national leader in education, is supporting the headteacher and providing additional leadership capacity.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is still not as good as it should be, but it is continuing to improve. Pupils' progress is strongest in Key Stage 2, particularly in Years 3 and 4 and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are doing better in reading and mathematics than in writing. Pupils are not being given enough opportunities to write at length, especially in Years 2 and 6.

There is still a good deal of ground to be covered for pupils to reach the targets the school has set itself for the end of the year. There remains considerable variability in the rates of improvement across different classes and groups of pupils. There are significant gaps between the progress of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) and their classmates.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants make detailed notes about children's development and use these to plan stimulating activities that are closely matched to children's interests and abilities.

The quality of teaching

Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and there is now a core of good and outstanding teaching that is being used to share good practice across the school. Where pupils make the best progress, teachers use assessment information very effectively to plan activities that are closely matched to pupils' needs, and teachers adapt their plans during the lesson to present new challenge to pupils. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson about angles, groups of pupils worked on carefully selected tasks of varying difficulty with enthusiasm and persistence. The teacher used her discussions with pupils effectively to quickly provide more challenging work or to address misunderstandings. Where pupils do not make good progress, teachers do not explain key ideas clearly enough to pupils and, as a result, pupils do not know how to tackle a piece of work. When this happens, pupils lose focus on their work and do not make the progress they should.

Classrooms and corridors are full of interesting and useful displays that celebrate and support pupils' learning across a wide range of subjects. In particular, the constantly updated displays of English and mathematics work in each classroom are used effectively by pupils and teachers to explain new learning.

Pupils' books show pupils are taking greater pride in their work and this is reflected in neater handwriting and better presentation. Across the school, pupils receive detailed and frequent feedback from their teachers to tell them what they have done well and what they need to do next. Pupils said they value this feedback and respond to these comments frequently to improve future work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As a result of more effective partnerships with parents and external agencies, pupils' overall attendance has improved, although it remains below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains above national levels. The majority of these pupils have special educational needs or receive pupil premium funding. The high absence rate of these pupils makes it difficult for them to make the progress they should. While there are systems in place to check and reduce absence, these have not had enough impact on the attendance of these groups of pupils.

Behaviour continues to improve and pupils told inspectors they have noticed the calmer, more purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils are responding well to the renewed emphasis on Christian values and the new behaviour management system. As a result, the number of pupils receiving a detention has reduced significantly since the system was introduced at the beginning of the term. The learning behaviour mentor has provided greater consistency to the way poor behaviour is addressed and has given valuable support to more vulnerable pupils to help improve their behaviour. The proportion of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion has significantly reduced, although this remains above national figures.

Pupils say, and school records show, that incidents of bullying are very rare and there have been no incidents recorded since September 2014.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders check closely the quality of teaching and learning, for example by visiting lessons frequently and looking at the work in pupils' books. Teachers and teaching assistants have received valuable training and guidance to enable them to improve their practice. Senior leaders have continued to drive improvements in teaching as a result of the valuable support the deputy headteacher has given to teachers on a one-to-one basis. Senior leaders have enabled good practice to be shared more effectively because they have thoughtfully paired teachers up to observe and learn from each other.

Senior leaders have introduced a more rigorous system for collecting and analysing information about how well pupils are doing. As a result, senior leaders and teachers now have a better understanding of pupils' achievement. This information is beginning to be used more effectively to give extra help to pupils who need it.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium funding has been reviewed and refined. As a result, much closer checking is in place to ensure that additional support is given to the right pupils. It is too early to see the impact of this work on pupils' progress.

Subject leaders for English and mathematics have received valuable support, often working with local authority advisers and senior leaders. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the school and a detailed knowledge of pupils' progress over time. The recently appointed English leader has swiftly and accurately assessed where weaknesses exist and has drawn up a detailed and tightly focused improvement plan to address these areas.

In recent weeks, governors have rightly focused on attracting and securing high quality candidates for staff vacancies. Governors have benefited from the improvements made to the collection and analysis of pupil assessment information and, as a result, they are asking more challenging questions of senior leaders. Governors continue to visit the school in pairs to monitor progress against the key areas for improvement, and this is ensuring they have a secure understanding of how well the school is doing.

External support

Senior leaders have a positive working relationship with the local authority's improvement adviser. The local authority is providing an appropriate level of challenge and support through its focused termly review meetings. Advisers from the local authority have worked with senior leaders to develop a rigorous programme of assessment of pupils' work and to formulate targets for subject leaders. The school

continues to work effectively with a group of local schools to check that assessments of pupils' progress are accurate.