

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



18 June 2015

Mrs Erica Carter

Acting Head of School

Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Whitfield

Hexham

Northumberland

NE47 8JH

Dear Mrs Carter

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

Following my visit with Michael Reeves Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 17 June 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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 17 June 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting head of school, three governors, a small group of staff and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Durham and Newcastle. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors visited six lessons to observe teaching and speak to pupils informally about their learning. They also scrutinised the current level of work in pupils' books, alongside the acting head of school, to gauge the accuracy of recent assessments and evaluate pupils' learning and progress over time. A wide range of documentation was evaluated, including the school's analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress, the recent checks made on the quality of teaching and the external moderation reports of teachers' assessment in Year 2 and Year 6.

Context

The executive headteacher has been absent from the West Tyne Federation of schools since April 2015. An interim headteacher, working two days per week, was appointed in the short term to oversee the federation as a whole. In the last week, an acting head of school has taken up post to lead Whitfield for the next 15 months, on a secondment basis, from Ponteland Middle Teaching School.

A new supply teacher has been recruited, part time, to support the teaching of English and mathematics in Year 3 and Year 4. Three nursery-aged children have joined the early years and Key Stage 1 class part time, in the mornings only, from Easter 2015. A nursery nurse has been contracted to work with these children. Governors continue to restructure so that they become a smaller, more sharply focused group. This reconstitution is due for completion by July 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Leaders have been unable to reverse the legacy of underachievement, especially at Key Stage 2. Pupils continue to make inadequate progress in their writing and mathematics. While a small proportion of Key Stage 1 pupils are making better progress, there remains unacceptably wide variation between different groups of pupils and across subjects. School tracking data, confirmed by the work in pupils' books over time, reveals that over half of the pupils in Key Stage 1 have made no progress in writing since the last monitoring inspection and the most able, in particular, fail to reach their full potential.

Children arrive in the early years with skills that are at least typical for their age; many exhibiting abilities above what is typical. By the end of their first year in school, children are already falling behind from their starting points. While school predictions for 2015 show that all children will reach a good level of development by

the time they transfer into Year 1, very few children will exceed this benchmark. This represents inadequate progress for too many children given their starting points.

Inaccurate assessment and flawed achievement data continue to thwart leaders' attempts to move the school forward rapidly. Although statutory moderation of pupils' achievements has been provided by the local authority, inspectors, alongside the acting head of school, found the levels agreed by the external moderator, particularly in Key Stage 1, to be inaccurate: judgements overestimate the quality of work evident in pupils' books. This has given leaders, staff and governors too rosy a view of pupils' accomplishments over time. Leaders have been poorly served by this external validation process.

Pupils' attainment and progress in reading, including their learning of letters and the sounds they represent (phonics), is improving at a faster rate. Daily, systematic teaching has led to a greater number of pupils from across the school making expected progress in this subject.

The quality of teaching

Insufficient focus has been given to improving the quality of teaching so that it remains inadequate. Leaders have failed to prioritise teaching as a key driver for improvement. Urgent attention needs to be given to improving teachers' assessment skills. Staff are unable to judge the quality of pupils' work accurately; consequently, they struggle to pitch lessons at an appropriately challenging level. Too many pupils receive identical work, regardless of their ability. While some finish quickly, others become frustrated because learning fails to meet their needs. Teachers' abilities to assess pupils' levels of understanding during a lesson are also weak. Misconceptions go unnoticed because questioning is underdeveloped as a teaching tool; teachers do not reshape their lessons to offer greater support or challenge based on the responses pupils provide. This compounds pupils' slow and inadequate progress.

Children in the early years do not receive the high-quality experiences they deserve. Teaching for nursery children is not always appropriate to their age or development. It is unacceptable for these children to experience French, music and religious education alongside much older pupils as they are not ready for this approach to learning in their first few weeks of school. It is imperative that leaders reconsider their approach to early education.

The teaching of reading shows greater signs of improvement. The introduction of a systematic and coherent programme to teach phonics has given staff the confidence to build pupils' learning progressively and at an appropriate pace. Training has enabled staff to use a range of teaching strategies to address pupils' reading difficulties successfully.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' learning behaviours remain underdeveloped. When work proves too easy or too difficult, boys, in particular, become bored and switch off from their learning. On these occasions, they stop listening to their teachers and disturb those around them.

Pupils show a lack of pride in their day-to-day work. Presentation is sloppy with scribbles, doodles and graffiti on pupils' books going unchallenged by staff; teachers' expectations are too low. Older pupils do not take care with their writing because they do not get the same opportunity as Key Stage 1 pupils to practise their handwriting. Teachers have not capitalised on the emerging strengths in teaching phonics as a way of addressing basic letter formation and spelling errors.

A recent initiative to improve pupils' attitudes to learning is showing some early signs of success. Pupils talk positively about receiving gold medals and having their photograph placed on the 'reach for the stars' board. This is raising pupils' expectations of what it means to work hard and focus on their learning. When motivated in this way, pupils are keen and eager to learn. Teaching does not capitalise on this increased engagement to enable a more rapid rate of progress.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have not demonstrated the skills needed to bring about rapid improvement. Constant instability at senior leadership level since the school was placed in special measures has resulted in a lack of continuity, inconsistency in key systems and a distinct lack of urgency in addressing school priorities. Leaders have failed to tackle the areas for improvement identified during the initial inspection some 16 months ago.

Ongoing discussions about the leadership of the school, and the wider federation, have been at the expense of improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement. Enhancing the skills and confidence of staff has taken a back seat for too long. Training opportunities have been sparse and unfocused. Even when staff have attended other schools to observe good practice, it has not resulted in any discernible improvements to teaching because they have not been held to account for the difference this training will make in their own classrooms.

The new, acting head of school brings the right level of expertise, drive and energy to make a greater difference at Whitfield. She has worked quickly and decisively in the short space of time since her appointment to assess the current situation for herself and formulate plans for more rapid improvement. These plans rightly prioritise improvements to teaching, together with more effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of teachers' work. Decisions have already been made about a more robust tracking and analysis tool so that no further time is wasted evaluating flawed data.

Governors are proactive in securing their own development. They have instigated an external review of their practice through a national leader of governance (NLG) and this is aligned to a programme of further training and support so that the recommendations made by the NLG can quickly become a reality. They are keen to challenge the school more rigorously and are beginning to ask more pertinent questions about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Despite governors' eagerness to be more challenging, their decisions continue to be based on flawed data and inaccurate validation of pupils' attainment. As a result, they have not had the influence or impact needed to move the school forward at pace.

External support

The local authority has not ensured the external moderation process at Whitfield is robust or fit for purpose. Reporting, especially at Key Stage 1, has been weak; inspectors and the acting head of school found validated judgements to be inaccurate. While leaders and governors should have trust and confidence in the information these processes yield, they have been presented, unacceptably, with misleading information about pupils' achievements. Statutory assessments need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency to ensure they are a true representation of pupils' day-to-day work.

Visits to good and outstanding schools have been ineffective as professional development opportunities. Staff have not reflected on their observations of colleagues' practice to enable rapid changes to their own work. While the acting head of school has been quick to enter into partnership working with two outstanding schools outside of the local authority, visits will have to be far more focused, with swift and rigorous follow up back in school, if these experiences are to make a lasting and telling contribution to school improvement.

The local authority and diocese have worked together to appoint an acting head of school with the right level of expertise to address the school's weaknesses. While the acting head of school brings recent experience of upper Key Stage 2, she will need regular, high quality support to address the issues identified in the early years and Key Stage 1.