

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



4 November 2015

Mrs Erica Carter
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 Janet Lunn, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 3 November 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 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 3 November 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting head of school, four governors, a small group of staff, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Durham and Newcastle and the primary commissioner for Northumberland local authority. Inspectors visited each classroom to observe teaching and speak to pupils informally about their learning. They also scrutinised the current level of work in pupils' books to evaluate pupils' learning and progress over time. A wide range of documentation was evaluated, including the school's self-evaluation, an analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress and the recent checks made on the quality of teaching. Safeguarding documents were also reviewed.

Context

The acting head of school continues to be seconded to Whitfield due to the extended absence of the executive headteacher. From September 2015, the acting head of school has taken on a 0.5 teaching commitment for Year 5 and Year 6 to allow for more targeted teaching of English and mathematics. The governing body has reconstituted. An additional parent governor has been appointed.

Outcomes for pupils

Underachievement remains the norm for too many pupils. After nearly two years in special measures, current assessment information provided by the school shows that approximately one quarter of pupils continue to make inadequate progress in their learning, across subjects and in both key stages. Pupils are not equipped with the fundamental reading, writing and mathematical skills needed to take full advantage of their learning and make up for the lost ground of previous years. This is wholly unacceptable; pupils' life chances are being put at a disadvantage.

In lessons, and when scrutinising pupils' work over time in their books, inspectors found that pupils still have a poor grasp of essential knowledge relating to grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, written work is often careless and littered with errors. Pupils are not routinely encouraged to remember their full stops and capital letters or apply their understanding of letters and the sounds they represent (phonics) to aid their spelling. In Key Stage 2, older pupils do not have an effective understanding of the rules of number or the rapid recall of times table facts to aid quicker progress in mathematics. Teaching has not prioritised these areas.

The most-able pupils are not supported to reach their full potential. Unvalidated data for the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 show that no pupils attained the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics, despite their typical and above-typical starting points. Similarly, no pupil reached the highest levels at the end of Key Stage 2 in these subjects. Recent questionnaires distributed by the school show that over a third of

the parents who responded agree that their children are not stretched to reach their true capabilities.

Pupils' phonic skills continue to improve. Outcomes of the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2015 are now broadly in line with national figures. Early years and Key Stage 1 outcomes have also improved, albeit slowly. However, overall, pupils remain one term behind their peers nationally in reading and writing and two terms behind in their mathematics as they enter Key Stage 2.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching remains highly variable and underachievement continues for a sizeable group of pupils across the school. Inadequate teaching has not been eradicated quickly; pupils' outcomes have not improved at an acceptable pace. Staff still set work that lacks challenge, especially for the most-able pupils. The activities pupils complete do not demand enough from them because teachers' expectations of what they can achieve remain too low.

Teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to master the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Faster progress evident in pupils' acquisition of phonic knowledge is not capitalised upon to support a better command of spelling. Teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to apply what they have been taught in longer, sustained pieces of writing or through mathematical problem-solving. Teachers spend too long ensuring the context for learning is engaging at the expense of planning for the precise learning needs of pupils.

Assessment of pupils' work is now accurate. While governors can have confidence that they are now receiving the correct information about pupils' achievements, the school has become reliant on the external verification of their assessments by an independent consultant. Staff do not exhibit the depth of understanding needed to make accurate assessments on their own, because they do not have a secure working knowledge of the age-related expectations of the National Curriculum. This lack of subject knowledge compounds teachers' difficulties in planning work that meets pupils' needs and abilities.

Children in the early years now receive a more appropriate range of activities for their age. Reading, writing and mathematical development is much better for this group as they have arrived at school with typical and above-typical skills and attitudes. Despite these high starting points, staff do not provide frequent opportunities for children to choose activities for themselves, including in the outdoor environment. As such, essential skills such as decision-making, perseverance and independence, the cornerstones of successful, lifelong learning, are underdeveloped.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils, especially boys, switch off from their learning when the pace of teaching slows and they are asked to complete mundane activities. On these occasions, pupils' concentration wanes and they find less productive activities to occupy their time: they talk over the top of adults, swing on their chairs and gaze out of the window. While staff are more alert to these disruptions to learning and employ a range of suitable techniques to regain pupils' attention, there remains too much off-task behaviour. This is reinforced by an inexcusably poor quality of teaching.

Pupils' social behaviours are better developed. Inspectors found all pupils they encountered to be articulate, polite and friendly. At breaktime and during lunch, older pupils showed imagination and creativity in devising new games to play with their younger friends that captured their interest and sustained their concentration. These positive skills are not capitalised upon in lessons.

Attendance is improving through concerted work with parents. Better lines of communication have now been established. There are more frequent opportunities for families to engage with the school and provide their own feedback on what is working well and where they would like to see even greater change.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders, governors and those providing support have failed to reverse the fortunes of the school and provide an acceptable standard of education. Leadership, at all levels, remains inadequate. It is inexcusable that 21 months after the school was placed in special measures, key systems and processes to drive a swifter pace of change are not yet in place; those that have been addressed remain in their infancy and show little impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Pupils, parents and the local community deserve better.

The acting head of school has not received the frequency or quality of support she needs to develop her leadership skills. Consequently, she has reverted back to what she feels most comfortable doing – teaching – and this has diverted her attentions away from whole-school improvement. Without the dedicated time needed to lead the school, important areas of work have slipped. The acting head of school has not followed up on key actions to ensure they are making a significant and consistent difference to the work going on in classrooms. Some crucial areas of work still await attention, most notably the arrangements for managing the performance of staff. Teachers themselves told inspectors that they no longer receive the detailed feedback about their work that they need.

A new system for analysing assessment information has been implemented. It is providing more useful insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. Governors are particularly appreciative that they now receive accurate information about how well pupils are achieving overall. However, there is no

analysis for different groups of pupils, such as the most able, or for those pupils receiving additional sessions to catch up with their peers. Leaders are working in the dark; they do not know if their actions are making any difference to pupils' progress.

A select few governors continue to strengthen their challenge to the school about the rate of progress being made. This small group are astutely aware that improvement has been neither swift nor effective. While some governors show insight into what still remains to be done, others are in denial about the poor quality of education being offered. Without honest appraisal from all members of the governing body, sustainable improvements will remain elusive. Too few governors possess the prerequisite skills or an understanding of the current educational context to bring about the significant step-change in practice that is needed.

External support

Inadequate support from the local authority has contributed to the school's continued failure. Officers have provided too little support at too late a stage in the special measures journey. The primary commissioner agreed with inspectors that the school's rate of progress does not reflect the local authority's ambitions, but this acknowledgement has not led to a more rapid or concerted response. The official warning notice issued to governors in February 2015 has not been reviewed despite one quarter of pupils at the school still making inadequate progress. Governors have voiced their concern about the support and challenge offered by the local authority over time. A new improvement partner was appointed in September 2015 but oversight remains weak; reporting of actions without reference to their impact in classrooms has proved to be a fruitless exercise. It has not held a mirror up to the school and allowed them to reflect, through external eyes, on what is working well and where significant improvement is still required. In the absence of any focused support from the local authority, governors have made some rash decisions, such as the acting head of school returning to the classroom. These have proven detrimental to improvement.

Diocesan support has improved recently. Governors found the joint lesson observation and work scrutiny that they have conducted alongside the Assistant Director useful. The external verification of assessment information has also proved valuable – a piece of work commissioned and financed through the Diocese. The roles and responsibilities of the local authority and Diocese remain unclear so that the overall package of support to the school has been ineffectual.