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24 November 2015

Ms Jo Warnock
St John's C of E Primary School
St John's Place
Canterbury
Kent
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Dear Ms Warnock

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's C of E Primary School

Following my visit with Gary Anderson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 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 monitoring inspection.

This letter and the 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 interim executive board, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - improving teachers' behaviour management to ensure that pupils behave well and pay attention in lessons, and that more lesson time is devoted to helping pupils learn
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of pupils, to retain their interest and raise their achievement
 - focusing on improving pupils' basic skills, especially in mathematics, and building on what pupils already know to make sure that work is set at the right level for them
 - improving the teaching of phonics, ensuring that pupils practise their sounds regularly, that they are heard reading more often and that pupils' reading records show parents and carers their children's phonics targets
 - making sure that teachers' marking gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, and their ability to use more interesting vocabulary when writing
 - identifying the most-able pupils' skills early and ensuring they have regular opportunities for higher level work, including in mathematics
 - ensuring that pupils' reading tasks across all subjects are matched to their abilities
 - providing additional support to raise the achievement of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, attendance and punctuality by:
 - effectively tackling and reducing incidents of poor behaviour and the number of exclusions
 - ensuring that teachers consistently implement the behaviour policy, and that senior leaders and governors closely monitor its impact
 - implementing robust procedures and working closely with families to raise attendance rapidly and to improve punctuality.
- Improve the skills of leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, by:
 - reviewing the leadership structure, clarifying roles and developing the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they take a full part in improving teaching and pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that teachers are provided with well-judged training leading to good subject knowledge, in order that their teaching of English and mathematics becomes consistently effective

- ensuring that the school improvement plan gives more subject-specific actions for improving English and mathematics, showing how actions will be checked and judged, and who will be responsible for them
- improving performance management systems to ensure that teachers' pay is linked to their performance ensuring that members of the governing body receive training backed up with detailed and accurate information about the school's performance so they are better able to challenge school leaders.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, four members of the interim executive board (IEB), and representatives from the local authority and from the diocese. Inspectors met with some parents at the start of the day, had lunch with pupils, observed the teaching and learning in all classes and looked at the work in pupils' books. During this visit, inspectors looked particularly at the accuracy of self-evaluation and the clarity, purpose and direction of leaders; whether leaders are ensuring a rapid improvement in the quality of teaching in all classes; and whether the rate of progress being made by pupils is sufficiently rapid.

Context

The number of classes has increased this academic year and five teachers joined the school in September. A new chair of the IEB took up the position two weeks ago. The leadership structure has been revised and the early years leader has been promoted to the position of assistant headteacher.

Outcomes for pupils

Across the school, pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics are rising but not quickly enough, and there is still too much variability between classes and age groups. Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. At the end of the last academic year, there was a sharp rise in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. This means that these pupils arrived in Year 1 with skills which are in line with the national average. There was also a rise in pupils' skills at the end of Key Stage 1, so that reading is no longer significantly below average and mathematics skills are about average.

However, writing remains weak at the end of Key Stage 1 and significantly below average. There was a sharp drop in the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check. This means that fewer than half of the current Year 2 pupils, and less than a quarter of the boys, are able to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read simple words fluently.

The school's predictions for pupils' achievement in the Year 2 phonics screening check and in the Year 6 mathematics national tests were inaccurate and much too generous. Year 6 pupils achieved very badly indeed, particularly in mathematics.

Although pupils' writing skills improved, fewer than half of the pupils made the progress across Key Stage 2 that can be expected in reading and mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs made very slow progress despite high levels of support. This means that last year the oldest pupils left the school ill-prepared for secondary education. Throughout the school there are marked differences between the achievement of boys and girls. Boys do much less well in reading and writing. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils varies considerably from year to year and it is not clear whether strategies to promote their achievement are effective.

The school's assessment evidence shows that progress last year was not rapid and many pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6, started this year with skills well below the expectations for their ages. There are signs of improvement this academic year and, in most classes, pupils are beginning to make better progress. In a minority of classes the pace of improvement is rapid. However, pupils' books continue to show too much variability in the rates of progress and there is no convincing evidence that, in the majority of Key Stage 2 classes, the pace is fast enough to ensure that pupils catch up and achieve as well as they should. There is very limited evidence of high-quality, in-depth learning across different subjects such as science, history and geography.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There remains too much variability in the quality and impact of teaching across the school. Although there is some good-quality teaching, too much of it is still not good enough to enable pupils to make the rapid progress needed. Relationships in all classes are positive and there are often good opportunities for pupils to develop their social and communication skills. However, too often, teachers' expectations are not high enough. This means that pupils cover the same ground, do not complete enough work and are not moved on quickly enough to more challenging activities. This was why last year, although Year 1 pupils enjoyed reading, teachers did not make sure they learned different sounds quickly enough. School leaders say that this has been addressed. However, during this visit, not all of the early reading activities observed were interesting or challenging enough. Teachers are not all using strategies agreed in the past to promote good teaching and learning. Learning across different subjects is sometimes superficial and opportunities are missed to link the learning and make it more meaningful. Teaching assistants often provide valuable support but this is not always the case.

This variability in quality is less evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 where the quality of teaching and its impact on children's learning are more consistently good. Throughout the school, where there are interesting activities, high expectations, clear objectives and sufficient challenge, the quality of teaching and learning is also strong. Pupils respond well and show that they are keen to learn.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

This aspect of the school's work has continued to improve. There is a strong focus on pupils' safety and welfare. Pupils understand the behaviour management routines because adults use the school's policy consistently and effectively. Provision such as the Rainbow room and early morning sensory circuits supports particular pupils' personal development and welfare well. Pupils are encouraged to think about their own feelings and to have consideration for the feelings of others. They are polite and friendly, work well together and are generally attentive. Occasionally there is low-level fussing and off-task behaviour in lessons, and this is directly linked to the quality of teaching.

Systems and procedures to make sure that pupils are safe in school are rigorous and well managed. Similarly, there are effective systems to encourage high levels of attendance and provide follow-up and support if necessary when attendance is a cause for concern. As a result, attendance improved last year so that it was just below the national average, and there was a sharp fall in the number of pupils who had too much time off school. The number of fixed-term exclusions also dropped. These improvements have continued into this academic year and, so far, attendance is about average. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has dropped again and there have been no exclusions so far this year. A few pupils still arrive late and the school works well with families to address this.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have not been able to speed up the rate of improvement and make sure that pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, achieve as well as they should. Some of this is due, in part, to staff changes. However, an overarching weakness is in leaders' ability to effectively and accurately evaluate the impact of actions and measure their success. For example, they do not precisely evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions to support pupils with special educational needs, and strategies to support disadvantaged pupils to discover which strategies are working well and which are not successful.

The school's current self-evaluation is not rigorous or accurate. It is overgenerous and not sufficiently based on a secure evaluation of how successful, or not, actions taken in the past have been in raising pupils' achievement. Leaders have not effectively analysed information about how well pupils are achieving to identify key weaknesses and trends for groups. Weaknesses, such as the achievement of boys in literacy, pupils' phonics skills and the progress of pupils who receive special educational needs support have not been highlighted. As a result, despite being very long, the current school improvement plan is not informed by an accurate evaluation of last year's outcomes for pupils, and key priorities are omitted. The current milestones are not aspirational, nor are they sufficiently challenging.

Senior leaders have achieved important improvements in behaviour and welfare. There is a strong focus on ensuring pupils' safety and well-being. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Relationships with pupils, parents and families are positive. Provision for pupils who are learning English is well managed. Leaders were able to recruit new teachers and some of these staff are already making a strong contribution. The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed effectively. The leader uses information about what children can do to identify strengths and weaknesses, and then plans activities designed to address the weaknesses. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the rising achievement of pupils in Reception. Senior leaders are seeking to enhance the capacity of leadership by enabling a member of staff to undertake an appropriate special educational needs qualification. Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning, which had fallen away during the spring and summer terms, have been re-introduced. It is too early to see any positive outcomes from the checks or the follow-up, and some long-standing weaknesses in the quality of teaching remain.

The IEB continues to provide a great deal of support and challenge. It has been frustrated by the difficulty of accurately evaluating progress and has been, at times, over-reliant on the local authority to inform it about how well the school is doing, rather than knowing itself how well things are going. The lack of clear and measurable milestones last year made it difficult to evaluate how rapidly the school was improving. At times, the information provided by senior leaders includes too much detail and this tends to obscure the bigger picture of continuing underachievement in some classes and for some groups. At other times, the information provided is too general to be helpful.

The local authority and the diocese are working together to ensure that, if the school becomes an academy, suitably strong sponsorship arrangements will be in place.

External support

Over time, the school has received a great deal of support from the local authority, including training for staff, leaders and subject leaders. The headteacher has also received leadership coaching from another headteacher. Initially, it has often appeared as if this support has been received well and is beginning to make a positive difference. The local authority has then attempted to draw back to let the school take a stronger role in driving improvements. However, leaders have not ensured that initial improvements following training and coaching have been maintained and become embedded in everyday school practice. For example, training on strategies to improve the teaching of mathematics initially resulted in changes in teaching strategies. However, on a recent review of mathematics teaching, few if any of these strategies were seen in practice. As a result, the support provided has sometimes had limited impact.