

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Hannah Peaston
Brenzett Church of England Primary School
Straight Lane
Brenzett
Romney Marsh
Kent
TN29 9UA

Dear Hannah Peaston

Special measures monitoring inspection of Brenzett Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 June 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2015.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Canterbury and the director of children's services for

Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2015

- Quickly improve teaching to raise the achievement of all groups of pupils by making sure that all teachers:
 - always have high expectations of how hard pupils should work and what they should achieve
 - use assessment information to guide their planning so that work set in lessons is consistently at the right level for all groups of pupils
 - set interesting and challenging activities so that pupils do not become distracted and learn well
 - check pupils’ understanding effectively throughout lessons and adapt their teaching if necessary
 - establish clear expectations for spelling, punctuation and grammar for each year group
 - plan and teach lessons that build effectively on pupils’ existing knowledge, understanding and skills
 - give helpful feedback to pupils which enables them to improve and make strong progress.

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - implementing a rigorous and effective system to check all aspects of the school’s work, including provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, ensuring that the evaluations are based on pupils’ achievement
 - ensuring that all teachers develop a good subject knowledge in mathematics
 - giving reading a high priority in the school and encouraging pupils’ enjoyment of reading
 - making sure the curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
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- Improve the early years by:
 - ensuring that children are consistently provided with a range of interesting activities that promote effective learning, particularly in the outdoor area.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management 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 management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 29 to 30 June 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the interim deputy headteacher, the seconded special needs coordinator, members of staff, four members of the interim executive board (IEB), and representatives from the diocese and the local authority. The inspector carried out several visits to each class with the headteacher, looked at the pupils' books and had lunch with pupils.

Context

There have been changes in staffing, both teaching and non-teaching, since the previous inspection. At the time of the previous inspection, the headteacher had been seconded into the school as an interim headteacher. She became the substantive headteacher in January. The key stage 1 and 2 classes have had changes of teaching staff, and in the case of one of the classes many changes, particularly last term. An IEB took over the governance of the school in April. The school will become an academy on 1 October 2016, with Aquila, the multi-academy trust managed by the diocese of Canterbury.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher, supported by local authority advisers and colleagues from other schools, has implemented effective systems for monitoring, coaching and providing professional development for staff. The local authority facilitated the secondment of a deputy headteacher and a special educational needs coordinator to strengthen leadership and teaching in the short term. The IEB took up its responsibilities in mid-April and, since then, the quality of leadership, monitoring and evaluation has strengthened further.

A key focus of leaders has been to recruit high-quality staff, particularly teachers. This has not been easy and the leaders have demonstrated a determination to make sure that they recruit the high-quality teachers required to turn this school around. It has also been necessary to make some changes to support staffing in order to ensure efficiency and balance the books. The instability in staffing has resulted in disquiet among some parents and uncertainty among pupils. In the past, assessments have not been secure and in some cases have been overgenerous. This gave a false sense of security to staff and parents. Assessment is now accurate and highlights the fact that pupils in key stage 1 and in lower key stage 2 are making slow progress. Staffing in both of these classes has stabilised very recently with permanent appointments. Although it is very early days, there is already a

noticeable positive impact on behaviour, attitudes and the work pupils are producing.

The previous inspection reported that pupils who have special educational needs were not receiving the support required to help them make sufficient progress. The seconded special educational needs coordinator, in the short time she has been with the school, has rightly focused on making sure that the group of pupils with the most complex needs receive appropriate support. She has also provided some training for support staff. The systems for providing and evaluating suitable everyday support for pupils are in their infancy and further training is required before effective interventions can be provided.

Both the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan may well have been fit for purpose back in January when they were written; however, neither has been effective in moving the school on rapidly. This is due, in part, to the shifting sands of staffing which made parts of the plans irrelevant and unable to be acted on. For example, the actions relating to subject knowledge in mathematics have not all taken place due to changes in staffing. Both plans are over complicated, include a lot of activity which obscures rather than clarifies, and are not sufficiently focused on the areas for improvement identified at the time of the inspection in November. The regular local authority-led progress and impact meetings are also not clearly focused on the areas for improvement. The plans are unwieldy and not readily amended in the light of changes which have happened since November.

There is a danger of drowning in detail and missing the bigger picture. For example, simple actions such as ensuring that, where necessary, pupils read to an adult every day have not happened. The reading records for some pupils show long gaps between opportunities to read individually to an adult. Nonetheless, the systems for teaching reading have been tightened up with a more consistent approach to teaching early reading and phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Pupils have more regular opportunities for reading in groups. During the visit, the Year 1 and 2 pupils enjoyed their reading session and were keen to read out loud and talk about the books they were looking at. There is also an increased emphasis on spelling and punctuation, although pupils' spelling is often poor with key words spelled incorrectly.

Despite revisions to the curriculum since the inspection, it is not yet broad or balanced in practice. There are good opportunities for physical education and music. However, the quality of the provision for subjects such as science, history and geography remains poor in key stages 1 and 2. It is much better in the early years where all the areas of learning are well covered both inside and outdoors.

A detailed review of the pupil premium funding has been carried out and the reviewer has carried out a follow up visit. Another visit is planned for the autumn term. An action plan has been created; however, many of the actions have been

delayed due to competing demands on leaders' time and the long-term absence of the family liaison officer.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There have been huge variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the four classes since November, until very recently. The situation has now improved. This is reflected in the pupils' books and in the information from assessment checks.

In the youngest class, the children are enthusiastic and confident learners as a result of rapid improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Careful planning, captivating activities, imaginative use of resources and subtle but effective prompting by adults promote effective, enjoyable learning inside and outdoors.

Throughout the rest of the school, the picture is much more mixed. In the middle two classes a combination of inadequate teaching and rapid changes in staffing over the past year have held up the pace of improvement. For example, although there are routines and expectations for the teaching of reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar, these have not been implemented consistently across all classes. In the Year 5/6 class, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the deputy headteacher took over the class are evident in the pupils' books. Pupils have responded well to higher expectations. In particular, their presentation has improved markedly as has their confidence to have a go, even if the work is harder than they have been used to. The quality of teaching in the other two classes has also improved but only very recently. In almost all of the observations of teaching and learning during this visit, adults checked pupils' understanding and gave useful feedback to address misunderstandings and move the learning on.

The quality of teaching in subjects such as science has been poor throughout the year in key stages 1 and 2 and this is reflected in the pupils' books. Expectations in these subjects remain too low.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils generally behave well and feel safe in school. They are polite and friendly. Relationships are positive throughout the school. Children in the Reception class are confident and inquisitive learners. In the other age groups, pupils are beginning to show signs of enjoying and taking more pride in their learning. They cooperate well and enjoy each other's company. They are willing to persevere even when they find things a little confusing or difficult, particularly when they are enjoying themselves. This was obvious in the first ever rounders game for the key stage 1 pupils. It is still the case that some pupils lose focus and become distracted in less interesting lessons or during whole-class sessions. Most pupils attend school regularly and attendance is about average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs is much lower than that of the other pupils. The figures are somewhat skewed because of the small numbers involved and the poor

attendance of a very small number of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

The pupils' reading, writing and mathematics knowledge and skills are still exceptionally low and, across the school, disadvantaged pupils achieve much less well than their classmates. The exceptions to this rather gloomy picture are in Reception and in Year 6 where achievements are more typical of other pupils of the same ages. There is also some evidence in the books that Year 5 pupils are beginning to catch up. Pupils in these age groups have made more rapid progress during the year as a result of better and more consistent teaching. Children in Reception have many opportunities to write and, as a result, they form their letters correctly and can write at some length using interesting vocabulary. There is also evidence of opportunities for children to challenge themselves. For example, one Reception child independently and correctly listed different sets of two numbers which add up to 20 and then 40.

Pupils from Year 1 to Year 4 have continued to make very slow progress. Expectations have been low in terms of how much pupils should produce and at what level. Much of the work in books, particularly in writing is low level and scrappy. There is little evidence that the school's increased focus on spelling and punctuation is having a positive impact. There is, however, evidence of an improvement in the quantity and presentation of work in mathematics. The new teachers are bringing about some rapid improvements in pupils' attitudes and on their willingness to concentrate. Already some Year 4 pupils have shown that when expectations are high enough they can rise to the challenge and produce a decent quality and quantity of work in both mathematics and in writing. When teachers give the pupils interesting activities and challenges the pupils respond well which shows that they have the potential to achieve much better.

External support

The school receives and continues to rely on a great deal of external support. The local authority adviser provides regular support which is valued by the school. Similarly, support from headteacher colleagues in a mentoring role has also been valuable, particularly in adding to the headteacher's checks on the quality of education across the school. The secondments of the interim deputy and special educational needs coordinator have resulted in improvements in provision, leadership and teaching quality. Early years advice has been acted on and improvements are very evident, particularly in outdoor learning. In some cases, although support has been provided it has not been effective due to staff changes. The local authority and diocese provide regular opportunities to monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making. These meetings are not sharply enough focused on the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in November.

Leaders and staff should work together to:

- swiftly review and simplify their plan for improvement
- make the plan manageable and sharply focused on the key actions needed to bring about rapid improvement.