

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



5 February 2018

Mrs Caroline Lowe
Acting Headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
Blakebrook
Kidderminster
Worcestershire
DY11 6AP

Dear Mrs Lowe

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 January 2018, 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 February 2017.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Worcester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that there is strong and incisive leadership of the school at the highest levels and that the leaders focus on improving teaching and outcomes for pupils
 - ensuring that there is a cohesive school improvement plan that has a clear focus on the most important priorities for the school, sets challenging targets for improvements and is measurable and achievable
 - ensuring that monitoring and evaluation, involving leaders, governors and external expertise, are used effectively to check on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' outcomes
 - embedding the assessment system within school so that pupils' progress and attainment can be accurately tracked to identify where outcomes are not sufficiently strong
 - developing a broad and balanced curriculum so that pupils have improved opportunities to make good progress across all subjects
 - improving attendance for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities by ensuring that parents and carers fulfil their responsibilities in making sure that their children attend regularly and on time.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all teaching is consistently good or better and raise outcomes for all pupils, including children in early years, by:
 - making sure that all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve and plan and teach tasks that are well matched to pupils' abilities
 - providing more opportunities to write independently in extended pieces of work and to apply their writing skills in other subjects
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in problem solving using reasoning
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are used effectively in lessons to promote and extend pupils' learning, including in language development.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 January 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school, accompanied by either the acting headteacher or the acting deputy headteacher. The inspector looked at pupils' work with senior and middle leaders and scrutinised a wide range of documents. The inspector met with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, middle leaders, a group of staff, and the chair and three members of the governing body. The inspector spoke to the local authority adviser, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Spire Church of England Learning Trust and two representatives who provide support to the school on behalf of the learning trust. The inspector talked to parents and considered their views on Parent View, met with a group of pupils and talked to pupils informally during the day.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in February 2017, there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school. The headteacher left the school in April 2017 and the local authority appointed an interim headteacher to provide support and guidance to the school. The current acting headteacher took on the role of designated safeguarding leader. In September 2017, the deputy headteacher became acting headteacher. Subject leaders for English and mathematics have changed and middle leadership roles have been introduced or further developed. A family liaison worker was appointed in the autumn term. The school is due to join the Spire Church of England Learning Trust in March 2018 and will become an academy. The school is currently advertising for, and is planning to appoint, a substantive headteacher as soon as possible.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the inspection, the local authority has worked closely with the governing body to address the weaknesses in the leadership of the school. After the headteacher's departure, the local authority supported the governing body to appoint an interim headteacher for one term. The interim headteacher and governors worked alongside the current acting headteacher to develop the school's improvement plan, tackle areas of underperformance and make changes to the leadership structure of the school. As a result of these changes, there is now a clear sense of purpose and drive to improve the school. The support that the school is receiving from its academy sponsor is also having a positive impact on the pace of change in the school.

The acting headteacher, well supported by her acting deputy, has been instrumental in driving forward improvements that need to be made to the school. Staff describe the journey of improvement since the inspection as one that has clear

direction, consistency, pace and high expectations. They spoke with enthusiasm, saying, 'We know where we're going and we're going there together'. Governors are now receiving the right information about all aspects of the school, enabling them to hold leaders to account more effectively. Governors are fully committed to improving the school at a pace and there is a palpable sense of optimism about the school's future plans. The majority of parents are positive about changes to the school, and feel that communication between home and school has improved. However, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to reassure some parents that the school is doing the very best for their children.

The school's development plan, based on the evaluation of the school, is fit for purpose and reviewed regularly. All staff understand the priorities for further improvement. Actions are well targeted and there is an appropriate range of monitoring activities in place that enable leaders to check on progress being made. However, leaders need to ensure that their rationale for judging progress towards these targets in terms of red, amber and green ratings is more sharply defined and linked to measurable outcomes where appropriate.

The acting headteacher has recognised that in the past there has been a lack of accountability for staff, coupled with low expectations, resulting in poor outcomes for pupils. As a result, leaders and governors have overhauled their policy and processes for managing teachers' performance. Expectations have been raised, and are now linked to pupils' outcomes. Where teachers' performance is not of an acceptable standard, leaders are not afraid to challenge this, but also provide coaching support to bring about improvements. Regular checks on teaching and learning maintain the high expectations of standards in teaching for staff.

Leaders have developed a robust approach to monitoring all aspects of the school's work. Learning walks, book scrutinies, governor visits and external reviews are planned in a systematic way so that leaders have a range of evidence to draw upon when checking that improvements are being made. Leaders' open approach to information-sharing ensures that all staff have a clear understanding of what is expected from them, and when.

Professional development opportunities are having a positive impact on the school's work in several different ways. For example, new middle leaders are now beginning to receive support to develop their leadership skills in areas such as work scrutinies, lesson observations and managing teaching assistants. Some of this support work has only recently begun, and therefore needs to continue so that middle leaders can contribute fully and effectively to school improvement work.

Professional development opportunities have focused not only on developing leadership skills, but on improving classroom practice in order to raise standards in pupils' outcomes. All staff receive training in key areas, such as developing writing and using assessment information well, to help them improve their practice.

Leaders have now ensured that their systems for tracking pupils' performance are fit for purpose. Leaders and other staff are able to identify those pupils who are not on target to achieve age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have introduced six-weekly progress meetings with teachers to identify pupils who need additional help, and make sure that support is having a positive impact on their progress. Judgements that teachers make about pupils' work are now more accurate, as a result of coordinated checks of pupils' work, within the school, with other schools in the area and with the academy sponsor's school. The use of Venn diagrams to visually represent pupils who are either on track or not on track to achieve their targets has proved to be particularly helpful to staff and governors in maintaining their focus on improving outcomes. While leaders have a good overview of pupils' attainment, they are not yet analysing pupils' progress information in a similar, systematic way. As a result, they are not able to check that pupils are being sufficiently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable.

Changes to the school's approach to tracking pupils' progress and attainment have enabled the school's special educational needs coordinator to refine her monitoring systems. Consequently, there is now a more accurate picture of the progress and attainment of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, this system has only recently been introduced and is not yet embedded. Further clarity is needed from leaders about their expectations of what good progress looks like for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Leaders have reviewed their approach to the teaching of foundation subjects through topic work. As a result, pupils are able to access a broad range of subjects that interest them and engage them in their learning. Pupils to whom the inspector spoke talked with enthusiasm about the different activities and subjects they take part in. Leaders recognise that there is still some work to do to make sure that the curriculum meets the needs of the lowest ability pupils who are not yet able to access some activities in a meaningful way.

Leaders have not ensured that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of literacy. While there has been a focus on the development of writing, this has been looked at in isolation. While phonics outcomes improved in 2017, reading outcomes fell. The school's phonics scheme does not match the school's reading scheme, and staff do not apply the school's policy on the teaching of handwriting consistently.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders' higher expectations and support for teachers to improve the quality of teaching are now having an impact on pupils' outcomes. Pupils to whom the inspector spoke agreed that work was now harder in writing and mathematics. Actions to improve the quality of the teaching of writing are having a positive impact. Work in books shows that there has been a shift from grammar-driven lesson objectives to writing for a purpose, with a greater focus on meaning. Some

teachers are now modelling writing very effectively and the impact of this approach is reflected in pupils' work. Pupils are now applying their grammar, punctuation and spelling knowledge more consistently in their work. In 2017, there was a drop in outcomes in spelling in key stage 2, so leaders introduced a whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling. Information shows that this is having a positive impact on pupils' spelling outcomes.

There is still some variation in the quality of the teaching of writing in the school, in both key stages, but leaders know where the most effective teaching is. Skilled teachers are now beginning to be supported to develop coaching skills, so that they can work alongside other teachers in the drive for more effective teaching and better outcomes in writing. While not yet consistently applied, work in books shows that more pupils are now having more opportunities to write at length, using a more extensive vocabulary, both in literacy and in topic work. Leaders have not yet ensured that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting.

When teachers have high expectations, pupils' work is of a high quality. The inspector saw examples of imaginative writing in key stage 1, where pupils were confident to explain the meaning of the sentences they had written, such as, 'the witch's breath smelled like stagnant water'. A number of pieces of extended writing seen in key stage 2 were also of a high quality.

Pupils are now being given regular opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in problem-solving and reasoning activities. The school has changed its approach to the teaching of mathematics, so that pupils have time to consolidate and deepen their learning in a range of topics. Work in books across the school shows that pupils have frequent opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge through word problems. Teachers check pupils' understanding well in mathematics lessons, enabling pupils to articulate their reasoning about their work. However, feedback in books is less secure because the current marking policy is not applied consistently by teachers. On some occasions, spelling misconceptions are reinforced.

Lesson planning and work in books show that work is now better matched to pupils' abilities. Where practice is strong, pupils are challenged to complete more difficult tasks and deepen their learning. However, pupils to whom the inspector spoke felt that some work could be even more challenging. Teachers' use of questioning is most effective when pupils are encouraged to think about their learning, and explain their answers.

Leaders have reviewed the way in which teaching assistants are managed and deployed so that they can provide the right support for pupils where it is most needed. This work is at an early stage and has not yet had enough of an impact on pupils' learning. However, the inspector saw a number of teaching assistants supporting pupils skilfully to develop their skills in phonics, writing and mathematics. Teaching assistants appreciate the way they are now included in whole-school training. While a few teaching assistants have received training in language

development, this has had limited impact across the school as not enough pupils are benefiting from this expertise.

Well-planned, engaging activities in the early years provision are helping children to develop their skills in all areas of their learning. Following a religious education lesson, the inspector saw children absorbed in creating and designing their own 'special places', using materials, paint and technology, or writing about what would feature in their 'special place'. The early years leader has benefited from the external support she has begun to receive. She now has more accurate baseline information about children's achievements on entry to the school, because she is working more closely with local providers. Staff have begun to teach writing discretely in their efforts to raise standards. There is still work to do, as the early years leader recognises that not enough children are currently on track to achieve a good level of development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

When pupils are sufficiently challenged in their learning, they are focused and engaged in the activities set for them. On a few occasions, and usually when the work is not challenging enough, pupils' attention wanders. Overall, pupils behave well in lessons and around school.

During the inspection, a small number of parents expressed their concerns about bullying in the school. Detailed records show that bullying is taken seriously in the school, and is followed up if an incident is reported. Leaders hold weekly welfare discussions to review past incidents and concerns. Pupils to whom the inspector spoke said that there was very little bullying, and that they had confidence in members of staff to resolve any problems. They also explained that there is a 'worry box' in school, where pupils can write down their worries and post them, so that teachers can sort out any problems.

Leaders have reviewed and improved their approach to monitoring pupil absence and reviewing school attendance. Leaders are now more rigorous in following up attendance concerns, and holding parents to account. The appointment of a family liaison worker in the autumn term is helping to build positive relationships with families and to seek out further support if necessary. Attendance is improving slightly, persistent absence is reducing and a number of case studies show where leaders' actions have had a positive impact on the attendance of individual pupils. Attendance information shows that the majority of pupils attend school for at least 95% of the time.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics improved from the previous year. However, attainment remains below the standard expected of all pupils nationally. In reading, the

proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard dropped significantly, but improved in writing and mathematics. More pupils achieved greater depth in their learning compared with 2016, but figures are still below levels seen nationally. Leaders' current information shows that, due to the improvements being made in teaching and learning, more pupils are on track to achieve age-related expectations in 2018. Key stage 2 outcomes are not improving as quickly, because some pupils have gaps in their learning due to poor-quality teaching in the past.

In 2017, at the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading fell, but improved in writing and mathematics. Overall, very few pupils achieve greater depth in reading and mathematics, and no pupils have achieved greater depth in their writing for two consecutive years. Outcomes in phonics improved in 2017 and are now broadly in line with outcomes for pupils nationally. In contrast, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development fell in 2017.

The school's current assessment information shows that there is some variation between groups and year groups, due to inconsistencies in teaching over time. In Year 1, disadvantaged pupils are now outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers, but this is not the case in other year groups. Owing to regular internal and external moderation opportunities, teachers' judgements of pupils' learning are becoming more reliable. In the current academic year, information shows that some pupils are making accelerated progress in their learning, and more pupils are now on track to meet age-related expectations.

External support

Leaders and governors have worked closely with the local authority to make sure that additional external support provided for the school is well matched to the school's improvement priorities. Additional support provided by the school's agreed academy sponsor has complemented the local authority's work. Support to develop leadership capacity through coaching and mentoring has been a key focus. As a result, leaders and governors have the capacity to sustain the drive for improvement. The effective and cohesive approach to support for the school is beginning to have a positive impact on overall improvements.