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15 June 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 with Jo Evans, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 June 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

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

The school's improvement 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 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 the 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 for pupils 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 language development.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 June 2018 to 7 June 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and learning across all year groups accompanied, for the majority of the observations, by either the acting headteacher or the deputy headteacher. Inspectors looked at pupils' work, both in lessons and as a separate work scrutiny activity with senior and middle leaders. Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, the subject leader for mathematics, a group of staff and the chair of the governing body. The inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the inspection and met formally with a group of pupils. Inspectors met with the chief executive officer (CEO) of The Spire Church of England Learning Trust and the external consultant commissioned by the trust to support the school. The inspectors spoke by telephone to another external consultant and to the newly appointed deputy headteacher. The inspectors spoke to parents and carers on the playground at the beginning of the school day and considered the six additional responses since the last visit to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the school's conversion to an academy has been delayed. It is now scheduled to take place on 1 September 2018, when the school will join The Spire Church of England Learning Trust. The acting headteacher has been appointed to the substantive headteacher post and will take up her role in September 2018. In April 2018, the acting deputy headteacher was appointed to the substantive deputy headteacher role. The trust has supported leaders and governors to complete a full staffing restructure. As a result, an additional deputy headteacher has been appointed to the school, with responsibility for key stage 1 and the early years from September 2018. Three members of staff have left the school. There has been a reorganisation of teaching assistant roles, and an intervention team has been established, with effect from September 2018. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has left the school and has been replaced by a part-time SENCo, initially for one day per week, extending to two and a half days in September. The new SENCo is also the SENCo at the lead school in the trust and will divide his time between the two schools. An attendance officer has been appointed to the school within the last month.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and governors have maintained the momentum of improvement since the last monitoring visit. There is a strong commitment to providing the best experience of education for pupils; the chair of the governing body recognises that 'they (pupils) only get one chance'. The acting headteacher, along with her deputy, has clearly articulated to all staff that improvements are non-negotiable. Staff told

inspectors about the increased accountability, now in place, in terms of managing performance, monitoring teaching and learning, and improving progress and outcomes for pupils. Staff understand the importance of being held to account and welcome the changes because of the positive impact on pupils' outcomes. A number of parents to whom the inspectors spoke also expressed their increasing satisfaction with the school.

The CEO of the trust maintains a close working relationship with school leaders and governors, and, as a result, has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He has ensured that additional support is tailored to address the specific needs of the school. Leaders have further refined the school's development plan since the last monitoring visit. It is now sharply focused on actions which will have the most impact on improving the school. Responsibilities are shared between senior leaders within a realistic timeframe so that they are achievable and able to be sustained. Leadership at all levels within the school has been further strengthened through coaching and mentoring for subject leaders. Where subject leaders have developed an action plan, the plans complement the school's wider development priorities. Some further refinements of these plans are necessary to ensure that the intended outcomes are sharply focused. Leaders acknowledge that middle leaders' roles are still at an early stage of development. Middle leaders require further coaching and guidance to enable them to be effective in their roles.

The headteacher has further improved the quality of information provided to governors, and there is evidence that governors are asking more challenging questions of leaders. However, the capacity of the governing body is limited and relies on the skills of a small number of governors. The chair of the governing body and the CEO of the trust are fully aware of the current limitations and are taking steps to bolster support from within and beyond the trust. A review of governance has been planned once the school has converted to an academy.

Leaders have continued their systematic approach to monitoring all aspects of the school's work. Systems for tracking and measuring pupils' progress have improved since the last monitoring visit and provide a more detailed and accurate picture of pupils' achievements. Teachers have a clearer understanding of this information and are beginning to use it more effectively to inform their planning. Regular external moderation of pupils' work confirms that teachers are making accurate judgements about the standards of pupils' work.

Pupils are able to access a broad curriculum and told inspectors about the range of subjects they are able to access, as well as additional activities such as residential trips and bicycle safety training. Pupils said that they do a lot of English and mathematics. Currently, pupils have limited opportunities to carry out practical science activities and said that they would like to do more of these. Inspectors saw pupils developing their movement skills to good effect in a number of physical education lessons.

Leaders have further reviewed their approach to reading since the last visit. They have identified a suitable reading scheme, which complements the phonic approach they use, and will be introducing this in September 2018. The school's policy on the teaching of handwriting is now being implemented effectively.

Senior leaders and the newly appointed SENCo are in the process of overhauling the way in which pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive support. From September, there will be a team of 'intervention' teaching assistants who will support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or those pupils who have gaps in their learning and require additional help to catch up.

Teaching assistants have benefited from additional training and, following the staffing restructure, a clearer definition of their roles. Assistants told inspectors that they value being included in school development and they can see how the reorganisation of their roles will help the pupils make better progress. Leaders have planned more training for staff so that they can better support pupils, particularly in relation to language development and autism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning remains variable. Where there is strong practice, this is reflected in the improved progress and outcomes for pupils, currently in upper key stage 2. Overall, pupils are engaging well with their learning, and behaviour in lessons is good, especially when tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities. In a Year 1 class, pupils talked with enthusiasm to inspectors about what they had learned in their topic lesson about South America. In a science lesson, Year 5 pupils were able to explain how they were going to use different materials to increase air resistance so that they could drop an egg safely to the ground without it breaking. However, where the pace of challenge slows, or pupils are not clear about their next steps, pupils can become disengaged from learning. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses that exist in teaching and, as a result, are providing additional support for teachers through coaching and modelling.

Work in pupils' books shows that teachers are beginning to match activities to pupils' abilities more closely because teachers have a better understanding of the progress information they have about pupils. They are able to see where pupils have gaps in their learning. However, work is not consistently well matched to meet the needs of the most able pupils. These pupils are still not being challenged sufficiently well in their learning. Teachers are not taking the opportunity to use effective questioning to deepen pupils' learning or challenge their thinking. There are pockets of good practice in the school, but this is not yet well established across all year groups.

The drive to improve standards in writing is resulting in improving outcomes for the pupils. A focused approach in key stage 1 to improve writing standards is showing clear improvement, particularly for the most able pupils. However, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to improve the overall proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in writing, from the previously low baseline. Work in books shows that some teachers have the same expectations of pupils' writing in lessons, regardless of pupils' ability. As a result, activities are not well matched to pupils' learning needs. There is now more evidence of pupils engaging in extended writing tasks, but these improved expectations are not reflected in pupils' topic work across all year groups.

The teaching of mathematics is improving across the school. The enthusiastic and focused subject leader for mathematics has ensured that systems are in place to identify where there are either gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge or lower standards of teaching of some mathematical topics. With coaching and modelling support from the trust's specialist leaders in education, leaders have introduced mathematics intervention groups. Leaders have used the assessment information well to target support for pupils, and staff have received training to implement this work. Teachers also now take the opportunity at the beginning of lessons to provide focused, personalised activities, which address pupils' gaps in mathematical understanding. Work in books across all year groups reflects the strong promotion of problem-solving and reasoning activities. Pupils are becoming much more confident in developing strategies to solve word problems. Inspectors saw pupils working independently on a range of tasks, highlighting the key information that they needed to solve the problem. As a result of these improvements, pupils are making much better progress in mathematics across all year groups. Leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to further raise expectations for the most able pupils, especially in the early years and Year 1.

Teaching assistants are now more focused in their roles and help to tailor tasks which are better matched to pupils' abilities, particularly the least able. On some occasions, pupils are overly reliant on the help they receive and give up on a task too quickly if the assistant moves away from the group. At other times, teaching assistants do not have high enough expectations about what pupils can do. For example, on several occasions, after discussions with pupils, inspectors saw teaching assistants writing sentences for pupils to copy into their books rather than encouraging pupils to have a go at writing sentences for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous. Pupils and parents reported that there are now fewer incidents of bullying in the school, and if they do occur they are dealt with quickly by staff. Pupils feel that breaktimes can be boisterous, describing 'rough' play by pupils on occasions. This was an accurate reflection of breaktimes observed by inspectors in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. While the atmosphere at breaktimes is good

natured, there is little for pupils to do and many resort to playing 'chasing' games, even though pupils told inspectors that these are not allowed. Lunchtimes provide a more positive experience for pupils. They are well supervised by staff and are provided with equipment to play with such as hoops, skipping ropes and balls. Some pupils said they would like more variety of activities at lunchtime.

Pupils told inspectors that they have a range of responsibilities in school, including membership of the school council, or being a representative for e-safety or eco development. Currently, they feel that they have limited opportunities to carry out their roles in a meaningful way and would like to take on more responsibilities. All pupils to whom the inspectors spoke were positive about the school and would recommend it to others because 'it is friendly'.

There has been a slight decline in attendance since the last visit, and an increase in the number of pupils who are persistently absent. This is particularly the case for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged. Leaders are very aware of this and have now appointed an attendance officer to address these issues. In the short space of time since her appointment, the attendance officer has had a positive impact on reducing the number of pupils who are arriving late to school. Where individual absence is a particular concern, leaders have taken all the necessary steps to improve attendance, up to and including penalty notices.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's most recent assessment information shows that the majority of pupils are now making expected progress, and some are making accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is not yet consistent across all year groups and in all subjects. While attainment in writing remains low in Years 3, 4 and 5, there has been significant improvement in the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard since the start of the academic year, particularly in Year 5 and Year 6. There has also been an increase in the proportion of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 who are working at the combined expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

More pupils are now working at greater depth in their learning than previously. However, further improvements need to be made to ensure that the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards closes the gap with national averages.

There remains some variation in the performance of pupils who are disadvantaged, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders have not yet established clear systems for tracking the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities from their starting points, so it is not possible to see whether these pupils are making the progress they should. The SENCo recognises that the monitoring of the quality of support that pupils receive in groups requires a sharper focus in terms of its impact on pupils' outcomes. Currently, with the exception of science, leaders do not track the progress that pupils make in other curriculum subjects.

External support

The additional support the school receives, facilitated by the trust, continues to have a positive impact on the development of leadership capacity in the school. There is a strong focus on the development of leaders at all levels. Subject leaders are receiving bespoke support to enable them to lead their subject areas effectively. This work is at an early stage of development, but staff spoke positively about the support they are receiving and the difference it is making to their practice.

The local authority adviser who previously supported the school is no longer in post and has been replaced by a new adviser. The new adviser has not yet had the opportunity to visit the school and work with leaders.

As a result of the effective external support, leadership capacity is improving. However, leaders will be reliant on this help and advice until leadership capacity develops further and changes are embedded.