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Mrs Linda Chamberlain
Acting headteacher
St Paul's Church of England (Aided)
Primary School
Cross Lane
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Lancashire.
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Dear Mrs Chamberlain

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST PAUL'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mrs Frances Gander, (additional inspector) to your school on 11 and 12 October 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in March 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons, met with the acting headteacher, senior teachers, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been a complete restructuring of staff and classes since the school was inspected in March 2005. All pupils are now taught in single age classes, as a result of the appointment of two newly qualified teachers and a part time teacher. The

acting headteacher has continued in post but will retire at the end of the summer term by which time the governors expect to have made a substantive appointment.

Achievement and standards

There was a marked improvement in the results of the national tests in 2005 in English, mathematics and science. Pupils exceeded their targets. There were particular improvements in the progress of boys and pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. When children start school in the nursery, their attainment is exceptionally low, many children have very limited spoken language and social skills. Progress throughout the Foundation Stage is barely satisfactory so, by the time they reach Year 1, pupils' attainment remains low. Pupils in Key Stage 1 made good progress in 2004, although fewer pupils achieved the higher levels. Progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 is good in three quarters of lessons and satisfactory in the remainder. This reflects improvements to the quality of teaching, the good attitudes of pupils and the good match of work to pupils' capability. Learning and progress are slowed in the Foundation Stage by weaknesses in teaching and poor planning.

A whole school priority to improve speaking and listening and include planned 'talking moments' in lessons has led to improvement, especially in Key Stage 2. Pupils are articulate, talk confidently, listen in lessons and fully participate in class discussions. There has been good improvement to the provision for information and communication technology (ICT), such as the interactive whiteboards in all classes and a clutch of new laptops and computers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005

- To raise the achievement of all pupils by improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment – good progress, apart from the Foundation Stage where progress is inadequate
- To raise the achievement of all pupils in speaking and listening – good progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good, as they were during the previous inspection. Pupils show good interest, especially in lessons where there are effective links between subjects, for example, ICT and history. They spoke enthusiastically about mathematics, art and design and ICT and the visits they have made outside school. Pupils' behaviour is generally good. Some pupils, especially those in Year 6, develop into mature and polite young people, who readily discuss their work, their likes and dislikes. In most lessons, pupils behave well and respond very positively when asked to improve. They understand class routines and why they are important. Pupils are given many opportunities to take responsibility, a good improvement since the previous inspection. The reconvened school council provides an effective forum

for pupils to take the initiative and have a voice in school improvement. Older pupils take responsibility for younger pupils. However, children in the Foundation Stage spend too much time drifting around because of lack of guidance, especially in the nursery. Older children in the reception class behave well and showed very good understanding of routines and expectations in their physical development lesson in the hall.

The school provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. They have access to exercise through the curriculum and after school activities. Water is available throughout the day, and pupils have a satisfactory choice of foods at lunchtime. Pupils' attendance is improving, partly because of the very popular breakfast club started in September and other efforts by the school, with support from the education welfare service. The number of unauthorised absences has decreased.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improved since the last inspection. In several lessons it was good or better. Good relationships, the effective use of praise to motivate learners and firm discipline are consistent features of the good teaching. In the good or better lessons, a high priority is given to teaching basic skills, very good use of whiteboard technology and the effective use of teaching assistants to support pupils with learning difficulties. All pupils learn equally well, although a few pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) who are new to the school, struggle to cope in lessons because of a lack of support. The school has approached the LA to secure support for these pupils.

Weaknesses in teaching are all in the Foundation Stage. These include poor planning and management of the session to meet the needs of the youngest new arrivals. Praise is used too sparingly and expectations of the children are too vague and not shared clearly; many children were confused. Good quality outdoor provision is not included in planning for older or younger children. Recent structural improvements to the indoor environment have the potential to create a unified and effective Foundation Stage unit.

Assessment arrangements are good. The progress of individual pupils is tracked and support provided for those needing to catch up and for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils are familiar with their targets; good reference is made to class targets in lessons following the school's participation in the LA's intensive support programme for literacy and numeracy. Pupils' work is marked in detail and clearly informs pupils of what they need to do next to improve their work. Older pupils are sometimes encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by self assessment. The quality of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved. This is because the co-ordinator has time to complete paperwork, meet with teachers, and assess pupils. Advice in the form of monitoring by the LA has complemented this. The school has an updated policy and a stronger

link with the nominated governor. The school is currently reviewing the quality of pupils' individual education plans.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005

- To raise the achievement of all pupils by improving the quality of learning, teaching and assessment – good progress
- To improve the resources and provision in the Foundation Stage - inadequate progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The acting headteacher, with the support of the governing body and senior management team, has worked diligently and to good effect in many aspects of school improvement linked to outcomes of the last inspection. Governors support the school well and are very well informed about the progress being made and what remains to be achieved. All attention has rightly focused on the action plan. Improvements to the quality of teaching are good; effective monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observations and book checks and analysis of assessment data to inform the needs of groups of pupils in mathematics has taken place. Teamwork across the school is good and staff have worked hard to improve their teaching and pupils' learning. However, this is less apparent in the Foundation Stage where there is a lack of teamwork and a shared understanding of the way in which provision for the two age groups should gel. The headteacher is fully aware of the shortfall of support for EAL learners.

The leadership of the subject co-ordinators is developing well. There are useful shadowing arrangements in place to provide continuity. Leadership of mathematics is particularly effective. The co-ordinator leads by example through her outstanding teaching and has analysed assessment results in great detail to provide colleagues with specific information about groups of pupils. Good monitoring of teaching gives clear targets for improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005

- To improve the effectiveness of the school's management - satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA has provided a satisfactory level of support for the school. Subject consultants and support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have improved leadership and management of English, mathematics and ICT and much improved the provision for these pupils. Support for pupils with EAL is not yet in place. The impact of the intensifying support programme through its rigorous audit of current provision and the identification of training for staff is good. The

headteacher has benefited from the support of a consultant headteacher to assist her in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. The impact of support in the Foundation Stage has been limited and is still an area that needs considerable improvement. The LA action plan is satisfactory. It is closely aligned to the school action plan, which is also satisfactory. The school has the capacity to continue improvements under the leadership of the acting headteacher.

Main Judgements

Although the school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses, this visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education in the Foundation Stage and the level of support for pupils with EAL and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Rodger

Additional Inspector