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Mr Gary Wilkie
The Acting Headteacher
St James' CofE Junior School
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Forest Gate
London
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Dear Mr Wilkie

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES' CofE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Marianne Harris, Additional Inspector and Jane Chesterfield, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 July 2007, 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 became subject to special measures in February 2007.

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

Evidence

During the visit 11 lessons or parts of lessons were observed. Pupils were observed at break times and generally around the school. Discussions were held with the acting headteacher, a range of middle and senior managers, pupils from the school council, the chair of governors, the interim headteacher and representatives from the local authority (LA). A range of school documents was scrutinised.

Context

There have been substantial staff changes at the school since the last inspection. An experienced headteacher was appointed as an acting headteacher in January 2007. He will be leaving the school at the end of this term. In addition, significant proportions of teachers have left and have been replaced with temporary agency staff. Nine teachers will be leaving the school at the end of this term. The LA is

currently exploring the possibility of developing federation arrangements with other schools.

Achievement and standards

Standards and value added have been low and declining. Attainment in English rose from 65% to 72% between 2002 -2005. The school was not able to sustain this in 2006 and results fell to 63%. In mathematics and science results have fluctuated, with no improvement trend established.

School data predicts an improvement in the results of the Year 6 national tests in English in 2007. This would suggest pupils' progress for this cohort to be satisfactory in English. However, standards in mathematics are predicted to be well below those reached in 2006. Overall, standards seen in lessons and in the pupils' books remain below average.

Throughout the school there has been a recent emphasis on improving standards in writing. Inspection evidence shows little impact of this and improving writing remains a challenge because there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write. Those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are not well supported and as a consequence make inadequate progress. Pupils capable of faster pace and more demanding work are also insufficiently challenged. Consequently, their progress is limited.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science – inadequate progress
- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subject areas – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development continues to be satisfactory. Behaviour is good throughout the school, both in lessons and in the playground. Even when lessons are dull, pupils concentrate and try their best. They are friendly and polite and relationships are usually good. There are exceptions to this, particularly at lunchtime, when adults are not always courteous to the pupils and do not set a good example. Despite this, pupils care for each other and work together effectively in class. They have a suitable understanding of how to keep healthy and stay fit. Pupils do not make enough progress in the basic skills to be well equipped for the next stage of the education.

Quality of provision

During the visit, good teaching was seen in four lessons and inadequate teaching in three. The remainder of the teaching observed was satisfactory, but the work in the

pupils' books indicates that the quality of teaching since the inspection in February 2007 has not been sufficient to raise standards and help pupils regain lost ground. Furthermore, a high proportion of those teachers who taught good lessons during the visit are leaving at the end of term.

The weaknesses in teaching and learning highlighted during the previous inspection are still very evident. In particular, there is a lack of consistency in the extent to which teachers are providing their pupils with sufficient challenge and support to help them make the progress needed to catch up. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards to interest and engage pupils. They target questions well and use individual whiteboards to check pupils' understanding during the lesson. They prepare interesting and relevant activities, such as mathematics tasks based around a proposed class trip in Year 6.

In the majority of lessons, the pace is too slow to motivate pupils to learn well. Pupils' books show that in many classes the amount of work covered is insufficient. There is often too much direction of the lesson from the teacher and too few opportunities for pupils to learn independently and take responsibility for what they do. Teachers do not always introduce lesson objectives successfully and these objectives are often couched in jargon which is difficult for pupils to understand.

Despite improvements in the tracking of pupils, teachers are still not using this information adequately to plan work that meets the varying needs of the different pupils in their groups. Teachers' recognition of the standards their pupils reach is not always accurate. As a result of these factors, expectations for the progress pupils should make are not clearly understood, and many pupils either struggle or coast through their lessons. Teaching assistants are inadequately deployed in the majority of lessons and so pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are frequently not adequately supported.

The quality of marking across the school is inadequate overall. Teachers' expectations of their pupils' work are too low and they are ready to accept low standards and poor presentation. Errors and omissions in marking also reveal weaknesses in the subject knowledge of some members of staff.

The school fulfils all requirements to ensure that pupils are safe and secure. Pastoral care remains good and the learning mentor provides a good service to pupils and their families. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is inadequate and there is too little planned help to meet their specific needs. There has been good progress on establishing a tracking system that charts the progress of each pupil and this is now firmly in place. Some work has been carried out on setting challenging targets for each pupil, but this is still in the early stages. Although many classes have English and mathematics targets for groups of pupils these are not written in language that is easily understood and pupils are not sure what they are aiming for in order to improve their work.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Improve the consistency and demand of teaching and learning throughout the school – inadequate progress
- Track the progress of pupils more closely and set more challenging targets – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has been in the post for approximately one term. Together with the acting deputy headteacher, he has established a clear focus and direction for the school, which is beginning to raise staff and pupil morale. The acting senior leaders are resolute in changing the culture of the school to focus firmly on learning. This is beginning to have an impact although they recognise that many inconsistencies remain. Changes have begun, most notably in challenging inadequate practice and providing support to remedy weaknesses, setting up clear systems for tracking pupil progress and increasing training opportunities.

The chair of the governing body is committed to the school's success but does not yet have a good grasp of what governing a school in special measures requires. Governors do not receive enough information about standards in lessons and in national tests, with the result that they are not well placed to help the school improve. Heavy reliance is placed on the acting senior leaders by the governors and LA.

The capacity of middle managers to move their school forward is inadequate. This is a significant barrier to improvement in the quality of provision and standards particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and in developing pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT). However, there has been some success in improving provision in English which has contributed to raising standards at the end of Year 6. Pupils reported that their English lessons were more interesting.

Appropriate programmes of continuing professional development supported and delivered by LA advisors have been established but it is too early to see the impact of these developments. In addition, the rapid turn over of staff means that the impact of this training is often lost.

The school's action plan is satisfactory. It encompasses the key issues from the inspection of February 2007 and has identified appropriate actions to address them.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Ensure that all those with leadership and management roles can properly account for the standards of pupils' work and the quality of educational provision within their areas of responsibility – inadequate progress

External support

The quality of support provided by the LA for school is inadequate. The statement of action is satisfactory overall, and the LA's target date for the removal of special measures at the end of summer term 2008, is sensible.

The LA has provided support for the English and mathematics subject leaders to enable the school to make the expected progress against the issues identified in the report. The staff consider this support to be useful. However, there are no effective systems and procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions taken, or of the pace of development in raising the quality of the education provided for the pupils. In addition there is no strategic co-ordination of the support received by the school.

The LA has recently undertaken a review of the school's progress, and the resultant report whilst helpful has not identified the serious weaknesses in provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities nor suggested effective strategies that can be evaluated to measure progress against the identified issues. The future direction to ensure improvement is unclear; for example, there are no written agreements or procedures, which detail the roles and responsibilities of the in-coming managers to secure improvement.

The LA has used its power to place additional governors onto the governing body.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to contact and discussion with HMI.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently improve the organisation and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese of Chelmsford and the Director for Children and Young People's Services for Newham.

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria
Her Majesty's Inspector