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1 July 2009

Mrs Janice Craven
Headteacher
Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School
Westloch Road,
Cramlington,
Northumberland,
NE23 6LW

Dear Mrs Craven

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School

Following my visit with Peter Bannon, additional inspector, to your school on 30 June- 1 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures –satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese for Newcastle and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland local authority.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 30 June -1 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, middle managers, teachers, groups of pupils, one parent, members of the governing body standards committee, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in March 2009, the then 'acting headteacher' has taken up her substantive role as permanent headteacher and a new chair of governors has been appointed. They have overseen the implementation of a governing body standards committee who, alongside the local authority task group, are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the progress the school is making towards tackling the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. There has been discontinuity in teaching for some pupils, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and lower Key Stage 2 classes, due to significant periods of staff absence. Currently three classes are being taught by supply teachers. A teacher with leadership responsibilities was appointed in May on a one-year contract and a new leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been appointed. She will take up her post in the autumn term. At the beginning of summer term the school moved to refurbished premises within Cramlington and this has provided a more spacious and appropriate learning space. The local authority continues to provide significant support to the school.

Achievement and standards

Senior managers, with the support of the local authority, are taking a range of effective steps to improve pupils' attainment and progress and as a result standards have risen since the time of the last visit. Observations of pupils work in lessons and teachers' regular assessments show that pupils' progress has accelerated successfully in Year 6. However, this has not been enough to fully tackle the legacy of underachievement that was identified at the time of the inspection. Recent teacher assessments indicate that pupils in Year 6 are now attaining broadly average standards in English and mathematics; albeit with a lower than average proportion attaining higher levels. Pupils' progress has improved well over the same time in Key Stage 1. Inspection evidence and end of Key Stage 1 assessments show standards in reading, writing and mathematics are now above that found nationally; including the proportion attaining higher levels. This represents significant improvement on the past two years' results. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has also improved due to individual interventions and effective support that is designed to close gaps in their learning. However, progress across some year groups has been more variable. For example, pupils' progress has been much slower

in Years' 3 and 4, in part due to the significant turbulence in staffing in these classes. Pupils' progress in Year 5 has been steady due to the actions taken by teachers and senior managers, but not always at fast enough a pace to compensate for pupils' previous poor performance.

Strident action has taken place to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage and with significant support and guidance from the local authority, outcomes for children are improving. Teachers' assessment of children's progress is now accurate and this information is increasingly being used to plan work that more effectively meets their individual needs and interests. Current assessments show children are reaching broadly average levels in their learning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics and ensure that the curriculum is planned to cater for the needs of all pupils in these subjects – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The school continues to build on strategies developed at the time of the last visit to improve pupils' attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. Through its actions the school is giving coherent messages about its high expectations of attendance to pupils and parents. Attendance has improved and is now broadly average and the proportion of persistent absences has reduced significantly. Although the number is reducing, there are still too many parents taking holidays in term-time. The school makes clear, in posters across the school, the potential damage this can cause to pupils learning.

Pupils' behaviour was judged good at the time of the last inspection and continues to be so; as are pupils' attitudes to learning, the relationships between staff and pupils and relationships amongst pupils themselves. However, the move to the new school premises and improved behaviour management strategies has made a big difference to pupils' perception of behaviour in school. Pupils report that lessons are no longer disrupted by the small proportion of children who in the past have sometimes stopped them making the most of their lessons. Pupils say they like their new school, the space it provides and the wider range of facilities it offers and are taking good care of it. They say their teachers are making learning more fun and are particularly pleased with the headteacher's approachable manner, high expectations, and the improvements she is making to the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Regular monitoring of teaching by senior and middle managers, training and individual support to teachers where necessary, is improving its quality. This is helping to tackle the underachievement in some year groups and helping more pupils to make faster progress in lessons. The proportion of good lessons is increasing and some are outstanding. There has been a consequential reduction in the proportion of satisfactory or unsatisfactory lessons. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the visit. However, pupils' progress in lessons is uneven, especially in lower Key Stage 2 classes where there has been significant changes of staffing recently and in more satisfactory lessons where teaching is not always planned to meet the needs of everyone.

A strong focus on teachers' planning by managers has improved its quality and consistency and more teachers are using the good assessment information they have about pupils' achievements to match work to interest and engage them. Good relationships between pupils and teachers and pupils' positive attitudes to learning are typical of all lessons seen during the visit. In good or outstanding lessons, skilful questioning draws pupils into discussion, giving them time to express ideas and respond articulately and with confidence. However, there are still some satisfactory lessons where planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' prior learning and where the pace of learning is not fast enough to ensure all pupils make the best progress they can; particularly higher ability pupils in Key Stage 2.

The curriculum remains satisfactory. It is improving because it is becoming more effectively matched to pupils' individual needs. It is supplemented by an increasing range of intervention programmes for pupils who are not making good progress in their lessons or who find learning difficult. These pupils are effectively supported in class, or in small groups, often by well-deployed and well-directed teaching assistants. Evaluation of pupils' progress following these interventions indicates they are beginning to successfully accelerate the progress pupils make. The school is aware that more improvements to the curriculum are required so that all pupils can be stimulated and challenged to do their best.

Assessment procedures developed by the last monitoring visit have been rigorously followed by all teachers. Consequently they now have an accurate and regular view of the performance of all their pupils. This information generally provides the starting point for individual pupil target setting and is increasingly being used in teachers' planning. However, there are inconsistencies in the effective use of this information which results in some lessons being more satisfactory and consequently pupils' progress in these lessons slows. The quality of teachers' marking is improving; some is very good. This, alongside more accurate target setting, and pupils' own evaluation of their work, is helping pupils to have a clearer understanding of how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve further. Again, inconsistencies remain. For example, marking generally celebrates

what pupils are doing well but does not always pin down exactly what it is that pupils need to learn next. The quality of presentation of pupils work in their books is variable. The school is aware that more needs to be done to make sure that all children take a pride in their work so that all work is presented as well as that found in the best classes and plans are in place to improve matters.

Through good partnership working with the local authority, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and provision in the Early Years Foundations Stage since the last visit. For example, there has been good progress in the challenge to promote independent learning and there is now a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Teachers work together to plan more systematically and have successfully extended the range of activities available. They have developed more accurate and rigorous tracking of how well children are doing in teacher-led activities in order to plan the next steps in children's learning. However, the assessment and recording of child-initiated learning is less well developed. Teachers are well supported by teaching assistants in ensuring high quality care for the children in their charge. They are becoming increasingly adept in extending the scope of outdoor learning across the curriculum. The outdoor area is significantly better than at the last school, as is its use. It more effectively mirrors indoor activities, but it is too small to enable pupils to fully explore and develop their gross-motor skills.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Provide enough space for children now in Reception to learn effectively outdoors in all areas of the curriculum – satisfactory
- Improve the accuracy of assessment of learning and ensure that this information is used effectively to set appropriately challenging targets for pupils – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The building blocks being put into place at the time of the last visit are now built on stronger foundations. Senior leaders are tackling the areas for improvement with tenacity; the headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to work well together to move the school forward. They are well supported by the local authority and now by middle managers who are relishing the emerging leadership roles they have been afforded. They are beginning to contribute to whole-school evaluation and the school's improvement priorities as well as to improvements in their areas of responsibility. The collective impact of senior and middle managers work is most evident in the improvement in the quality of teaching, planning, marking, use of data and the faster progress pupils have made since the last visit. However, some improvements are fragile and not yet embedded across the school and therefore progress is satisfactory overall. In the short period since the last visit the governing body have transformed their approach. The standards committee has developed and implemented a cycle of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school from first hand evidence and from thorough regular review of the information and data that is

gathered, including both the school's and the local authority improvement plans. Such work, alongside the training they have accessed, is helping them to understand impact of actions taken to improve areas of weakness and to challenge where necessary. They have a very clear understanding of what is working well and what needs to happen next and are fully involved in identifying the actions needed to improve further. However, this work is only recent and has yet to make a full impact across all key issues.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that senior leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the school efficiently and give more direction to the work of middle managers - satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided good and timely support to the school in areas that have required a particular focus since the time of the last visit. This is valued by the school and has made a significant difference to senior leaders' efforts to improve the quality of provision in the early years, the use of data and to the quality of teaching particularly. The local authority and school action plans have been reviewed since the last visit and are now sharply focused and completely aligned to the school's improvement plan. Both are regularly reviewed by the local authority's task group and the standards committee and this is assuring a continued sharp focus on what is working well and what needs to improve further. The local authority is also supporting the school in developing strategies to minimise the impact of the significant staff absences that have occurred since the time of the last visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Reduce the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and use of information to inform planning, so that lessons are differentiated enough to meet the needs and interests of all pupils to help them make the progress they are capable of.