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27 November 2009

Mrs T Richardson
Acting Headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
Blakebrook
Kidderminster
DY11 6AP

Dear Mrs Richardson

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

Following my visit with Philip Winch, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocesan Director of Education for Worcestershire and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, members of staff, the chair of governors, individual and groups of pupils, and a representative from the local authority. They also met with parents in the playground.

Context

Following a long period of absence the headteacher has resigned and will leave the school at the end of the current term. In June 2009 the local authority recruited an acting headteacher to lead the school until a new headteacher is in post. An assistant headteacher has been seconded to the school for the current academic year. Two classes are being taught by temporary supply staff. The deputy headteacher is working in a job-share situation, with a part-time teacher, to cover for a teacher on maternity leave.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The school's data shows pupils' attainment at the end of both Key Stage 1 and 2 as being lower than average. There are some noticeable variations between different groups' attainment. Girls generally out perform boys, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not attain as highly as similar pupils nationally. When children begin school in the Reception Year they do so with skills that are often in line with, or above, what might be expected. However, because too many pupils make insufficient progress across the different key stages, they under-achieve. As a result, too few pupils reach the higher levels of which they are capable and not enough attention is given to supporting under-performing groups. In the lessons observed, pupils enjoy their work and respond with interest to the different activities. Teachers' awareness of pupils' differing abilities is improving and they are planning work that is matched more closely to their capabilities. As a result, more pupils are making progress, but the rate of improvement is not yet fast enough to ensure that the gap between current levels of attainment and the levels expected is reducing.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- accelerate progress in all subjects to improve standards across the school – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is good. In lessons pupils are keen to learn and make progress. Their attitudes are positive and relationships with adults and each other are good. Pupils work together well and cooperate with one another sensibly. Behaviour in the assemblies, held during the monitoring inspection, was exemplary. Outside the classrooms pupils are friendly and welcoming. The staggered breaktimes work well to ensure that pupils have sufficient room on the playground. They get on well and play together sensibly.

Communication arrangements with families are improving. The weekly newsletters are appreciated, by parents and carers, as a way of keeping up-to-date with developments. The letters' regular focus on raising levels of attendance is having a positive impact. Attendance has improved since last year and is now satisfactory. In a drive to improve attendance further, and reduce the level of persistent absenteeism, the school has started to work closely with other local schools. For example, to try and reduce the number of families taking pupils on holiday during term time, the schools are working together to introduce common procedures.

The effectiveness of provision

There is an improving trend in the quality of teaching across the school. In the lessons observed the majority of lessons were satisfactory, but some were good. Classrooms are bright and inviting. They are organised well with good displays of pupils' work. The introduction of a common planning format is helping to ensure that teachers are setting out, more clearly, the purpose of each lesson. In the best lessons the learning objectives are explicit and set out exactly what pupils will learn. In other lessons the objectives focus on the activities the pupils will complete, without making clear how their knowledge and understanding will increase. Teachers are planning more accurately for pupils' differing abilities but, in some lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are unrealistic. For example, the less able pupils are sometimes set too much work, which they cannot always complete. This experience is demoralising and impacts negatively on their self-esteem. Teachers are increasingly confident in their use of information and communication technology to engage pupils in learning. They are beginning to introduce new ways of displaying instructions and materials that encourages pupils' interest and excitement. Lessons are often conducted at an appropriate pace but sometimes too much time is spent on teacher-directed instruction. As a consequence, not enough time is available for pupils to complete the tasks planned. Teaching assistants are being used to good effect and teachers' planning shows that good use is made of their support. They frequently work with pupils needing additional help and, in a few lessons, monitor pupils' progress carefully.

The quality of teachers' marking is improving. The introduction of the new school policy is helping to ensure greater consistency across the year groups. In the best examples, teachers' comments are written using carefully chosen words that pupils can understand. Some teachers are encouraging pupils to respond to their comments so that they gauge whether pupils understand how they can improve their work.

Teachers are giving much greater thought to delivering a curriculum that meets the pupils' needs and supports their progress. Opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are being exploited appropriately. Lessons are increasingly practical with challenges being set for pupils to solve. The use of topics that interest pupils is proving particularly effective at engaging them in learning. For example, the 'spy' theme in the Year 3 classes proved very popular at enthusing pupils in their work. Plans are being considered as to how best to build on these developments to ensure that there is sufficient progression across the year groups.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching by raising teachers' expectations, increasing the pace of learning and the level of challenge for all pupils – satisfactory
- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and builds effectively on what pupils have done so that progress is accelerated – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's leadership team are working well together. Safeguarding procedures are embedded and effective. The decision to make the acting headteacher full-time has been influential in bringing stability to the school. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a common understanding of what needs to be achieved to realise the school's goals. Morale across the school is good. The seconded assistant headteacher has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching. Roles and responsibilities are distributed appropriately among the school's leadership. Subject leaders are keen to take a lead and have carried out, to varying degrees, some limited monitoring activities to ascertain where improvements are needed. To improve the contribution they make towards achieving the school's improvement priorities, further support is being organised from local authority consultants. The leadership team has a clear view of the school's strengths and members have developed an appropriate plan to bring about the improvements needed. The monitoring of teaching is robust. Observations are detailed and accurate.

The governing body is taking a much closer interest in the school's work. Members have reorganised themselves into appropriate committees and allocated relevant

individual lead responsibilities. They have started to pay greater attention to monitoring pupils' progress by holding the school increasingly to account. They are developing their skills in analysing data about pupils' attainment, and building up their capability in supporting the school to improve.

The school has established procedures for monitoring pupils' progress. The information is up-to-date but not in a format that is easy to analyse, in order to monitor the progress of particular groups. Targets are being set, but these are not always challenging enough to eliminate low attainment among particular groups.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership, including monitoring and evaluation, at all levels so that there is a clear basis for planning improvements and effective strategies to ensure they are implemented – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has been working proactively with the school to provide the support it needs. Their statement of action needed amending when first submitted to Ofsted. The current plan has been strengthened and now provides a clear programme for improvement. The authority has been quick to implement its plan. It has responded to the school's needs and successfully secured the services of experienced and knowledgeable individuals to strengthen the school's leadership. The support from educational consultants to work with individual and groups of staff has also been influential in bringing about the improvements to the quality of teaching. The individual support plans are proving effective. They have laid the foundations needed to enable pupils to make greater progress.

The authority is monitoring the school's progress regularly. The reports are comprehensive and provide useful feedback, but they do not make explicit how much progress has been achieved against each specific recommendation.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement are those identified during the school's inspection in May 2009.