

Tribal
1–4 Portland Square
BRISTOL
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: Fiona.allan1@tribalgroun.com

6 July 2010

Ms Kerri Burns
Headteacher
Pells Church of England Primary School
Landport Road
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2SU

Dear Ms Burns

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Pells Church of England
Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22–23 June 2010, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and the Diocesan Director of Education for the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Pells Church of England Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22–23 June 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and executive headteacher, other staff in positions of responsibility, a group of pupils, the acting Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

At the end of last term three teachers, including the seconded assistant headteacher, left and were replaced by temporary staff. The headteacher of a local school was appointed as executive headteacher to work alongside the headteacher. The Chair of the Governing Body resigned and the vice-chair is filling this role on a temporary basis. Two new parent governors were appointed. An advanced skills teacher, seconded from another local school, continues to work for two days a week in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The number of pupils at the school fell by about one fifth at the end of last term as parents and carers sought places in other schools. More recently numbers have stabilised. The number of classes will reduce from five to four in September. A deputy headteacher, two class teachers and **two individual needs assistants** have been appointed on permanent contracts for September. At that point the coordinator for special educational needs, also currently seconded from a local school, will hand over the role to one of the permanent staff.

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

The pupils' achievement is beginning to improve because they are starting to make more progress in all year groups and to enjoy their learning more. Their progress is accelerating because of more engaging teaching and a clearer awareness on the part of pupils about the purpose of their learning. However, these improvements are recent and there remains much lost ground to make up for a significant number of pupils. Their attainment remains low overall with particular concerns over the quality of writing, alongside speaking and listening skills. The recent unvalidated end-of-key stage assessments of Year 2 pupils indicate that attainment in English and mathematics is likely to be below that seen nationally. The school's assessment of Year 6 pupils, approaching the end of Key Stage 2, shows their attainment also remains below that expected of 11-year-olds in English, mathematics and science.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour is improving, largely because learning is becoming more purposeful. There are fewer incidents of serious misbehaviour and the atmosphere in lessons is more positive. Nevertheless, pupils continue to lack independent learning skills. They are overly dependent on staff to support them in sustaining their focus and moving their work forward. Pupils are beginning to make a greater contribution to their school and its community, for example Year 5 pupils visiting incoming Reception Year children in their nursery setting to aid their transition.

The effectiveness of provision

Lessons are more effective in meeting the differing needs of pupils through better reference to assessment information. The temporary teachers have stepped purposefully into the breach, engaging well with the work to improve teaching. Staff have higher expectations of pupils, although opportunities continue to be missed to challenge the more able. Activities are more engaging because they are increasingly practical and pupils seldom spend too long having to sit passively. Learning objectives are usually shared with pupils so they know what to do. However, the features of successful work are not routinely clarified to help pupils structure their work or assess their own progress. Staff are better at managing behaviour by more consistent application of agreed strategies. Calmer lessons mean there are more opportunities for discussion, which are helping pupils to develop their ideas, alongside their speaking and listening skills. Marking has improved. It is more suitable to the age of pupils receiving it and gives more useful guidance for improvement. It remains rare, however for pupils to be asked to respond to it or for teachers' comments to refer to pupils' targets. Pupils' awareness of their targets continues to be uncertain, although some good practice is developing to help them take responsibility. For example Year 4 and 5 pupils updated their own targets on a display sheet and were more able than at the time of the last visit to explain these.

The curriculum has begun to be reorganised and is providing more stimulating starting points, making more links between subjects and affording interesting possibilities for writing. The pupils are enjoying the themes, as seen when Years 1 and 2 pupils completed written work about life in Brazil. These developments are at an early stage and have yet to be refined to ensure secure progress in skills within the subjects involved. Reading materials have been sensibly reorganised to enable pupils to access appropriate material more easily. Guided reading sessions are inconsistent in their usefulness, with pupils making good progress when working with staff but sometimes achieving too little when working independently.

The identification of pupils with special educational needs and the provision of support for them have improved sharply. Skilled work by the coordinator has rectified the backlog of unrecognised need. Individual and small-group withdrawal sessions have improved and are starting to make an impact on pupils' progress. Support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities in day-to-day lessons is better. Teachers make more appropriate provision because they are more

aware of what these pupils should be achieving and of how to help them. Teaching assistants are deployed more effectively. They are clearer about the expectations of them through better communication with teachers and because they have begun to receive appropriate training. Coordination with external agencies, such as local authority speech and language support, has improved and the school is making much more effective use of outside expertise to help its pupils.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has strengthened and is having more impact on children's progress. The temporary teacher has worked closely with the advanced skills teacher to improve the learning environment. This has been reorganised to link to the required areas of learning. Its layout is more straightforward, enabling children to gain independence because they understand more easily what to do in each area and where to get equipment from. Activities are planned more effectively to support progress in children's learning. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported more closely, including through the use of additional adults. Procedures for assessing children's progress have been tightened with better recording by staff. However, this information is not consistently used to plan the next steps forward so as to extend learning. Equally some opportunities for learning are still being missed. This was evident in a session where half the children learnt about shape with the teacher, while the others used large playground toys but were not encouraged to exploit this as a basis for reinforcing their knowledge of shape, such as by laying out a square track.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that pupils' progress is regularly and accurately assessed and recorded, and this information used to monitor their progress and plan challenging next steps in learning for all, especially the more able – satisfactory.
- Develop planning, assessment and resources in the Early Years Foundation Stage to fully reflect the different areas of learning and rapidly bring about improvements in the provision – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have begun to have more impact on the quality of pupils' experiences. The headteacher, supported by the executive headteacher, is providing clearer direction and demonstrating better capacity to bring about improvement. Staff morale has recovered after a difficult period. The headteacher has secured full staffing for this term and has made permanent appointments for the longer term. A culture of high expectations is emerging. Strategic planning has been simplified so staff are clearer about the immediate priorities and their contribution. Long-term goals are suitably challenging. However, there is still a need to provide explicitly measurable intermediate steps to check the progress toward these and to include developments in leadership alongside the understandable focus on improving teaching. Monitoring

the quality of provision is having a greater impact than at the time of the last visit. Inadequate practice has been tackled. Lesson observations and analysis of assessment data are being used to inform increasingly useful feedback to staff. Nevertheless there is sometimes too little reference back to previous areas set for improvement when observing lessons. Limited progress has been made in developing the work of subject leaders but the emphasis has been placed correctly on securing better leadership at senior level. The governors, in spite of the potential setback caused by the resignation of the chair, have gained in strength. They have a good level of expertise, visit regularly and are holding the school increasingly to account for the progress made. They have been supportive during this period of turbulence in staffing. Governors are keen to improve communication with parents and carers to ensure they understand the impact of the changes being made at the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the role of subject leaders in identifying and addressing weaknesses in their subjects so that they play a full part in improving achievement and standards – inadequate.

External support

The local authority moved quickly after the first monitoring inspection to bring about improvement. Coordination of its support has wisely been concentrated in the hands of fewer people and is making greater impact as a result. The School Improvement Partner is now the main contact, with the executive headteacher also a key conduit for guidance. Action plans have been simplified and linked more closely to those in school. Monitoring the school's progress, providing challenge where necessary and directing the work of other personnel, such as consultants, is now more focused. The local authority is giving appropriate emphasis to developing the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no additional priorities for improvement and the school should focus on those identified in the inspection of September 2009.