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25 May 2010

Mrs A Southgate
The Headteacher
St George's Church of England School
Meadow Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA11 7LS

Dear Mrs Southgate

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

Following my visit with Thomas Gibson and Michael Milton, additional inspectors, to your school on 18 and 19 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 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 subject to discussion with the monitoring HMI.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St George's Church of England School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 May 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and managers, groups of students, the consultant headteacher, governors, and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors observed 22 parts of lessons in English, mathematics, science and humanities. Three of those lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. In addition, three learning walks were undertaken focusing on behaviour.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been changes to the leadership of English, mathematics, science, special educational needs and the sixth form. In addition, the school has been dealing with a number of capability and personnel issues, some of a serious nature. This has taken up a significant amount of senior leadership time but has not yet had an impact on their ability to bring about improvement. It will be important that governors and the local authority work together to ensure that these matters are concluded as quickly as possible.

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

There were no outstanding lessons observed, half were judged to be good, the remainder largely satisfactory with a small percentage that were inadequate. This confirms the school's own analysis, and is a clear improvement from the last inspection. The school has significantly reduced inadequate teaching through the robust use of capability procedures and more effective support for individual staff. The quality of teaching was strongest in humanities and weakest in science. Humanities lessons have clearly improved as a result of teachers' acknowledging weaknesses in their practice and embracing the support offered by senior leaders. Progress observed in lessons in mathematics was satisfactory overall.

Validated GCSE results for 2009 have become available since the last inspection. The overall number of students gaining at least five good passes rose substantially, and was just below the national figure. However, the number attaining five good passes including English and mathematics continued the slow decline relative to national figures that began in 2007. Standards in English and mathematics were well below average, and in science were exceptionally low. Standards in both English and science declined. This represented better overall achievement than in 2008. Evidence provided by the school indicates that the 2010 GCSE results will be similar to 2009. The school does not expect a significant improvement until 2011.



Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate students' rate of progress in all subjects, especially in mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour is beginning to improve, but there is more to do to ensure that a culture of positive behaviour to support learning is embedded across all subject areas.

The school was generally calm and behaviour largely satisfactory during the inspection. Movement around the school was orderly, although some students were reluctant to move quickly to lessons. Behaviour in class is variable and dependent on the quality of teaching. Where there are high expectations, good pace and interesting activities students readily engage with learning. In these lessons, which were most consistently seen in humanities, behaviour was good. Behaviour of this quality was also seen in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, it does not make a consistently good contribution to learning in these subjects, particularly in mathematics and science. In some lessons teachers are not assertive enough, do not use rewards and sanctions effectively, and too readily accept low level disruption. Exclusions, both fixed term and permanent, remain at a similar level to last year. Fixed term exclusions are largely for rudeness or a failure to cooperate with staff.

Attendance in the sixth form has improved significantly and is now well above what is typical. This is a result of improved monitoring and targeted work with individual students and their families. The system for monitoring the attendance of students who attend courses elsewhere is not as robust.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the attendance and the monitoring of attendance in the sixth form – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is beginning to improve as a direct result of the actions taken by senior leaders. It is still weakest in the core subjects, particularly mathematics and science. Good lessons were characterised by a clear identification of students' current attainment, activities that were closely related to their interests and a crisp pace that kept them actively engaged. In addition, these lessons were firmly rooted in clear success criteria that were shared with students. In the weaker lessons, expectations of both progress and behaviour were too low, pace was slow and ineffective use was made of teaching assistants. The quality of questioning in order to test students' learning is variable. There was little evidence of open-ended questioning and opportunities for developing higher order thinking were limited. Teaching is hampered by the timetable which routinely allocates two-hour classes across a range



of subjects and, in one extreme case, a four-hour class. This places a considerable additional burden on teachers, particularly the significant number of inexperienced ones, to plan activities that will hold students' interest for such a long period of time. It is very important that the senior leadership's goal to significantly alter the timetable from September 2010 is achieved.

There are new systems in place to track the progress of students, but senior leaders acknowledge they have not been introduced quickly enough and have therefore had little impact. Half-termly assessments are available but teachers do not routinely and consistently make use of this information to plan lessons. This is now an urgent priority as senior leaders have recognised it is key to securing future improvements to the quality of teaching. Marking of written work is patchy and does not consistently provide sufficiently clear guidance on how to improve. Students are becoming more aware of their progress in some subjects, particularly in humanities and in some English classes. This good practice is uncommon.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- embed effective assessment practices in all subjects – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Development planning is sensibly based on short-term goals to deal with the most pressing issues identified by the previous inspection. Consequently, the headteacher and governors have not established a clear, strategic vision for the longer term. Self-evaluation is more rigorous and largely accurate. Senior leaders are now able to correctly judge the quality of teaching and they make good use of this information to put in place appropriate strategies for improvement. The school has made good progress in improving the management of teaching and learning. The governing body, through the recently constituted 'Challenge Committee', is beginning to offer more challenge to senior leaders. The governors have revived the use of link governors to seek the views of students, teachers and parents. Governors know this improved degree of challenge will need to be maintained, and that their role as critical friend requires further strengthening.

The most striking example of the impact of leadership and management has been in the improved work in the school's specialism. The humanities department has a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses, has accepted the urgent need to improve teaching, and has done so. Lessons, taught by even by the most inexperienced, were consistently good because they were based on a clear understanding of students' prior learning and their interests. If teaching of this quality were consistently replicated in the core subjects the school would have a very solid foundation for further improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:



- increase the rigour of school self-evaluation – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action sets out a clear set of actions and appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures to support the target to remove special measures by April 2011. The local authority conducted a rigorous review of teaching in January 2010 which confirmed the inadequate inspection judgement. Since then the local authority has provided a good range of support which has had demonstrable impact in improving the quality of teaching. However, the recent secondment of a deputy headteacher by the local authority has not had any significant impact. The local authority is aware that it will need to increase its level of challenge to senior leaders and governors to ensure the school continues to make at least satisfactory progress. This is imperative given that both the senior leadership team and the governing body have remained largely unchanged since the school was placed in special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that by September 2010 the timetable enables teachers to consistently plan lessons that secure good progress and behaviour