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6 December 2013

Miss Pam Keen
Headteacher
Priory CofE Primary School
Jubilee Road
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Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 8EF

Dear Miss Keen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Priory CofE Primary School

Following my visit with Paul Latham, additional inspector, and Morag Kophamel, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better, particularly in Years 3 and 4, by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide work that closely matches pupils' different needs and abilities so that pupils are effectively challenged and supported in lessons
 - pupils are actively involved in their learning during lessons
 - children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have more frequent access to the outdoor area and that it is planned for and is as stimulating as the indoor classrooms
 - teaching assistants are fully involved in all parts of lessons to support pupils' learning
 - teachers' marking helps pupils to improve their work and pupils are provided with the time they need to respond to their teacher's comments
 - teachers have the opportunity to observe good and better teaching within and beyond the school.
- Accelerate progress, particularly in Years 3 and 4 and raise standards in writing and mathematics, so that an above-average proportion of pupils reaches the expected levels of attainment by the end of Year 6 by:
 - providing more purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise their writing and write at length in different subjects
 - ensuring that pupils have a secure understanding of basic mathematics skills before going onto more advanced concepts.
- Improve the effectiveness of staff in preventing and dealing with bullying so that pupils' confidence in reporting incidents of bullying grows.
- Improve the impact and effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing the skills of all subject and senior leaders so they use data to assess pupils' performance accurately and use this information to inform their action plans, in order to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement in their subjects
 - ensuring that all members of the governing body have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities so that they can effectively drive the school forward and hold leaders to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 December 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation, including samples of work in pupils' books. They met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the headteacher from St Mark's Church of England Primary School, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board of Governors and two other governors, a representative from the local authority, a group of parents and two groups of pupils.

Context

There have been considerable changes since the previous monitoring inspection in July 2013. Five new teachers have been appointed. Two teachers have resigned. The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB). The headteacher and other staff from St Mark's Primary School continue to provide effective support.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics tests in 2013 was above the national average. Girls and boys performed equally well. However, the attainment of those pupils eligible for support through additional funding (the pupil premium) was below other pupils and below similar pupils nationally.

Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 remained below that of pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. None of the pupils in Year 2 attained the higher level in mathematics.

In 2013, attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remained below the national average in all subjects and was significantly below in mathematics and in the spelling, punctuation and grammar test. The school has established additional sessions in Key Stage 2 to focus on basic literacy skills. Teachers are getting better at helping pupils to write in sentences that use grammar and punctuation correctly. Lesson observations and work in pupils' books indicate that this is beginning to have an impact on their writing, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

The most recent information on pupils' achievement, collected by senior leaders earlier this term, indicates signs of improvement. Inspection evidence confirms that the proportion of pupils working at the levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is beginning to rise. However, pupils' achievement overall remains low, especially in Year 3.

Lesson observations and work in pupils' books show that progress is improving but that it is uneven across the school. For example, the progress of those pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium in Year 3 and Year 4 is weak while the progress of similar pupils in Years 2, 5 and 6 is good. This is directly linked to the quality of teaching pupils receive.

Teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing. For example, Key Stage 2 teachers have introduced 'writers' journals' and are planning a range of effective writing activities across subjects. Pupils are positive about the changes. They feel more confident about writing at length. Pupils are clear about their learning targets and work well together to improve their own and each other's writing. This is beginning to have an impact on pupils' progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6 where pupils are making at least good progress in writing. Again, this is not consistent across the school. In some classes, too many worksheets are used. This limits the pupils' progress in writing because they have little opportunity to make choices.

In mathematics, there is some evidence that teachers' marking is helping pupils to secure an understanding of basic mathematical skills. Pupils say that, when teachers use 'fix-it' marking it helps them to know how to, 'get better at maths'. Classrooms have more resources available to support pupils with the basic operations in mathematics. Inspectors observed pupils using these resources independently to help them to problem solve. However, it is too early to see the impact of this on pupils' achievement.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated. There is an increase in the proportion of good teaching. As a result pupils are making better progress than in the past. However, the school correctly identifies that there is not enough good or outstanding teaching. Teachers have appropriate improvement plans and are clear about how they are held accountable for the progress pupils make.

Effective support from subject leaders and from staff at St Mark's has helped teachers to improve the way they plan lessons. Lesson observations and book scrutinies indicate that, in many classes, teachers have improved how they plan activities for different groups of pupils and match work more closely to pupils' different needs and abilities. However, the impact of this on pupils' learning remains variable. This is because some teachers are not checking carefully on pupils' learning during lessons and acting promptly if pupils find work too easy or too hard. This delay sometimes leads to restlessness and low-level disruption as pupils become bored or frustrated.

In the best lessons, learning activities stretch pupils thinking and require them to use and apply their skills in different ways. In one mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were using a wide range of measures to complete learning activities. During the lesson, some pupils moved on to use a scale-drawing of Tower Bridge to measure and explore different dimensions of the bridge. This challenged their thinking further. As a result they were actively involved in the learning and supporting each other with the task and made good progress.

Parents and carers and the local community have worked with the staff to create a stimulating outdoor learning environment for children in Early Years Foundation Stage. The area is now established and is beginning to become part of the learning environment. For example, during the inspection, staff adapted planning in response to the windy weather. Children were using actions, movements and streamers outside to experience the effects of the blustery weather. Early Years Foundation Stage staff at St Mark's school are working with staff at Priory to ensure that effective use is made of the outdoor space in ways that complement the indoor space and maximises learning opportunities.

Teachers' marking is improving. Teachers are now using 'fix-it' comments to help pupils to improve their work. However, the comments do not always identify precisely what needs to be improved. For example, work in pupils' books shows basic errors in spelling, sentence structures and poor letter formation. These are sometimes unchecked over a period of time.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leaders have introduced a comprehensive behaviour policy which clearly sets out the behaviour expected of pupils. Peer mediators and the pupils' *Rights Respecting Squad* are playing a valuable part in improving behaviour. The school's approach to behaviour is linked to a UNICEF scheme based on human rights for children. Pupils talk clearly about what this means to them. They demonstrate a clear understanding about the 'five rights' and the responsibilities that go with these 'rights'. They are proud of the class charters and the bronze-to-platinum merit awards. Parents who met with inspectors were positive about the changes.

Pupils understand the systems in place to respond to any incidents of poor behaviour. They talk about the 'warning system' and feel that it is fair. They are confident that any problems are dealt with quickly. The school's values and expectations are on display and pupils referred to these when talking to inspectors. Those pupils who find it more difficult to manage their behaviour are supported by individual plans and weekly review meetings with parents and carers. Incidents are logged and monitored carefully and parents are informed quickly and consulted on the support plans. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in and around school had 'changed for the better'. However, the school's behaviour records do not yet demonstrate a reduction in the number of incidents recorded over time.

Pupils believe that incidents of bullying are rare and when they do happen they are dealt with quickly and appropriately. They accept that some problems occur from time to time but they were confident in the school's systems to deal with them. The school's own surveys indicate that the 'Friends Against Bullying' initiative is effectively embedding the anti-bullying message across the school.

When lessons are engaging and the tasks provide appropriate challenge, pupils show genuine interest and good attitudes towards learning. In lessons where teachers expect too little, the pupils become quickly bored, restless and distracted. For example, in some lessons pupils finished work quickly and waited for teachers to provide further tasks. Consequently, they became restless and began to distract others

Senior leaders are monitoring attendance closely and using a range of appropriate rewards to encourage pupils to attend regularly. The current attendance figure is above the figure for the equivalent period in 2012.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is leading the school with determination. She has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where further improvements are required. She has taken swift action to eradicate inadequate teaching and to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching. She knows that further urgent work is needed to improve the quality of teaching further. Teachers have programmes of support and a clear understanding of their accountabilities in terms of pupils' progress.

The headteacher from St Mark's continues to provide valuable support. As a result of this support the school has established robust systems for checking the quality of teaching and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. The nature of this support is beginning to change as the school's leadership team grows in strength and experience.

The senior leadership team at Priory has been strengthened by recent appointments and by the support provided by leaders from St Mark's. Senior leaders have checked the accuracy of the information they hold about pupils' achievement by moderating their judgements across the school. They have held class teachers to account at pupil progress meetings following the assessments at half term. Systems are now established to allow the school to check the progress of individual pupils and different groups of pupils. This is a significant move forward. However, leaders do not yet analyse the information carefully enough to draw conclusions and inform the next steps for improvement. Subject leaders and phase leaders are a growing strength of the school. English and mathematics leaders have a good understanding of the levels of achievement in their subjects. They are using this information effectively to provide focused training and support. They are checking the impact of their actions carefully.

The local authority has been in regular contact with governors since the last monitoring inspection. Following a review of governance, the governing body was reduced to a small group of people and an IEB was established. The IEB has a secure understanding of the issues facing the school. The Chair of the IEB provides an appropriate level of support and challenge. The IEB meet fortnightly and check improvements against the actions on the school's improvement plan. They regularly visit the school so that they can check, for themselves, how well pupils are learning.

External support

The local authority, in partnership with St Mark's Church of England Primary School, is providing a good level of support. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection the local authority has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. The local authority has responded swiftly to the recommendations from the first monitoring inspection in July 2013 and used its powers to deal with the weaknesses in governance.