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5 December 2012

Miss Samantha Price
Headteacher
St Peter's CofE (C) Primary School
Reservoir Road
Hednesford
Cannock
WS12 1BE

Dear Miss Price

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Peter's CofE (C) Primary School

Following my visit with Edgar Hastings, Additional Inspector, and Nigel Boyd, Seconded Inspector, to your school on 3–4 December 2012, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 17–18 May 2012. 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. However, newly qualified teachers should not be appointed without first seeking my approval.

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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire County Council and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012

- Improve teaching and accelerate the progress made by pupils in order to raise their attainment by:
 - ensuring that there is a systematic approach to teaching skills in writing and mathematics, and providing opportunities for pupils to use and apply these skills across the curriculum
 - sharing current good and outstanding practice regarding the expectations of pupils, and the pace at which they should progress
 - ensuring that teachers' marking provides pupils with consistently good guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, and that pupils are given opportunities to respond to teachers' advice.
- Improve the effectiveness of all leaders in order to secure rapid improvement by:
 - regularly and rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching and using this information to provide a coherent programme of professional development for all staff
 - regularly checking the progress made by all pupils in order to set challenging targets and hold teachers to account for pupils' progress
 - sharpening the skills of leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision so that they are able to support the headteacher effectively with school improvement.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 3–4 December 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, governors, a representative from the local authority and the consultant headteacher.

Context

The school has appointed a permanent headteacher, who had been in place for four weeks at the time of the last inspection, alongside several new appointments to the teaching staff. The governing body has almost entirely refreshed membership and also has a new Chair. There has been a slight decline in the number of pupils on roll. A consultant headteacher continues to support the school via regular visits and telephone contact.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment and progress remain inadequate, especially in the key areas of writing and numeracy. Progress is inconsistent between and within year groups. However, there are signs of improvement and pupils are now making reasonable progress in Year 6 and the Early Years Foundation Stage. School tracking data shows that Year 6 pupils are currently making progress in line with the national average.

Pupils have limited confidence or fluency in basic number work and are not equipped with a range of strategies to problem solve in mathematics. In lessons, teachers do not integrate mathematical problem solving into other mathematical lessons and, consequently, provide pupils with insufficient opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills. Presentation in mathematics is often poor, which results in pupils making casual errors in calculations.

Pupils are writing at length more regularly but still not often enough. Opportunities are developing for pupils to write outside of dedicated literacy lessons but these are often restricted by too much teacher talk. Pupils are very articulate and have good vocabulary but their spelling mistakes often go uncorrected. Presentation of written work is good in some classes but variable across the school. Where presentation is untidy it leads to errors in sentence construction and grammatical structures.

There are variations in the relative performance of boys and girls. Girls perform better than boys in literacy and boys perform better than girls in numeracy. This variation is largely down to teacher expectation and inconsistent monitoring.

The quality of teaching

There is still a wide variation in the quality of teaching and too much teaching that requires improvement. There is some good and outstanding teaching in the school but the sharing of best practice is not done in a systematic enough way to raise the performance of the whole team. The school's evaluation of the quality of teaching is too generous.

Marking has been a clear focus for improvement in the school and, as a result, is now much better than at the last inspection. Most marking is regular and developmental. Pupils are usually provided with good-quality guidance of what they need to do to improve their work. In the best practice, pupils are given the opportunity to follow up the comments of their teachers. The levelling of pupils' work (matching it to National Curriculum levels at each age) is underdeveloped and this undermines teachers' accurate assessment of learning. The linking of National Curriculum levels to lesson learning objectives is rare and there is limited use of targets. This lack of detail about levelling is contributing to the fragile tracking of pupil progress in the school.

In many lessons, too much teacher talk still limits the time pupils spend on the main activity and, when this happens, this slows the pace of learning. Questioning skills are variable and teachers do not often enough follow up with supplementary or assessment questions designed to promote greater depth of thinking. As a consequence, expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low and result in a lack of challenge. Teachers incorporate a wide range of resources into their lessons and many make good use of interactive whiteboards. However, the purpose of some activities is not clear and there is a lack of coherence between different parts of lessons. For example, the content of introductory 'warm up' sessions does not always match the content of the main lesson. In some cases, activities merely occupy pupils rather than develop their learning.

Relationships between adults and pupils are very constructive and positive. Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning and this is contributing to improved behaviour.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is improving. Children are proud to attend St Peter's and approach lessons with enthusiasm. In lessons, behaviour is mostly good. Occasionally, pupils exhibit some low-level off-task behaviour but this is usually related to lessons which are either uninspiring or pedestrian in pace.

Safety is given a high priority in the school and the single central record requirements are met. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is virtually

unheard of. When it does occur, it is dealt with well now and usually relates to name-calling or bad language.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the school has been through a significant amount of change in recent times. The new headteacher has provided a refreshed focus to the school and has won over the support of the staff and the community. She leads by example, is dynamic and enthusiastic. Her focus on school improvement has brought about an ability to challenge performance and make changes. However, the leadership team is very small and, despite the fact they are all committed to change and improvement, their size and experience limit their capacity. The lack of middle leadership limits progress in monitoring. At the moment, the future success of the school relies too heavily on too few leaders.

There is a wide range of monitoring activities taking place in the school. However, the systems are not yet refined and robust enough or linked to school priorities effectively. Leaders' confidence in making accurate judgements about the quality of teaching is growing but some judgements remain over-generous. The feedback provided following lesson observations gives teachers guidance on their strengths and areas requiring development but teachers are not given a clear picture of the overall quality of their teaching. Pupil progress is being tracked more rigorously.

There have been significant improvements in the school's performance management process and teachers are now being held to account for their performance. All teachers have been set ambitious targets related to pupil outcomes and the quality of their teaching.

Governors are committed to the school and ambitious. They are beginning to provide an appropriate level of challenge. They are provided with information about the performance and priorities of the school which enables them to ask the right questions. The school's engagement with parents and the community is strong.

External support

The quality of external support has been variable. The support offered by the consultant headteacher has been strong and advice from outside has been useful but is not always consistent. However, wider support from the local authority has been mixed and less frequent than might be expected for a school in its current position. It is an appropriate time for the school to review the nature and extent of the support it requires.