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6 May 2011

Mrs C Walton
Headteacher
Hoole Church of England Primary School
Hoole Lane
Chester
Cheshire
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Dear Mrs Walton

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Hoole Church of England Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff, parents and members of the governing body who kindly gave their time to talk to me, often at very short notice, during the visit.

Since the inspection on 11 May 2009 there has been considerable disruption to staffing. The then headteacher was absent through ill health from late 2009. The school was managed first by the, then new, deputy headteacher, supported later by an experienced headteacher from another school, who is a Local Leader in Education. Staff turnover has been high. Some classes have been taught by many temporary teachers. Following the resignation of the previous headteacher, the present headteacher took up her post in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' attainment is improving in English and in mathematics. Writing and mathematical problem solving of good quality were seen during the visit. Pupils' work was well presented. The school's records tracking pupils' progress show clear improvements for all classes except those most disrupted by the turbulence in staffing, where progress is slower. Evidence indicates that the school is currently on track for Year 6 pupils to reach average standards of attainment in English and mathematics this year, with a much higher proportion of pupils attaining above the national expectation than in previous years. Even so, such a performance would represent the least these pupils are capable of achieving. Poor results were achieved in 2009 and those in 2010 were only slightly improved.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The current position has taken two years to accomplish, which is why progress in making improvements is not judged better than satisfactory.

It is clear that the school has been through a difficult time. The local authority has been closely involved in monitoring what has been happening, providing both a high level of challenge and good support for the school. The focal point for the school's recovery has been in improving leadership and management. Improvements in governance and communications with parents were early successes achieved during the acting leadership provided by the new deputy headteacher and the Local Leader in Education. The new headteacher has continued in the same vein. Parents and governors testified to the new spirit of openness of senior leaders. Governors are much better informed with a clearer idea of their responsibilities. They are now well equipped to hold the school to account. For example, one governor said he had asked more questions in meetings this year than he had done in the previous five years put together. Parents and carers feel much more involved in the school. Indications are that the newly constituted parent/teacher association appears to be creating a welcome and renewed sense of school community.

Leadership roles are more distributed than they were, with experienced teachers relishing the opportunity to take increased responsibility for subjects and aspects of the school's work. The work of the inclusion coordinator, for example, is proving effective in championing the cause of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with social and emotional difficulties. Senior staff are in a much stronger position to evaluate the progress pupils make, to set realistic targets for pupils' attainment on the basis of accurate assessments and monitor their progress towards these. This process is relatively new and records are therefore incomplete at present.

Teaching is improving. Thorough and hard-hitting reviews carried out by local authority officers show the increasing proportion of better teaching over time. Broadly, teaching of good quality was observed during the visit. The lessons seen engaged pupils' interest and pupils cooperated well together in mixed-age groups. Pupils of all ages commented on their 'better' lessons and that their teachers made learning 'fun'. There was clear evidence that teaching assistants were providing more-effective support for pupils who were falling behind. However, there was also some evidence from lesson observations to indicate that pupils did not always receive the in-class support they needed to meet the wide range of ability and maturity seen in some classes. Teachers' morale has improved significantly since the inspection. They have learned from the work of consultants and from the opportunity to see and discuss good teaching in other schools. One experienced teacher spoke of, 'enjoying teaching again'. The new headteacher is proving to be an effective team builder. Staff are ready now to stand on their own feet without support as they develop the skills of self-evaluation and self-improvement. Although pupils' behaviour had been considered an issue, there was no evidence of inappropriate behaviour in the lessons seen or in the conduct of pupils around school. Pupils associated poorer behaviour to the time when they had a succession of temporary teachers.

Overall, the evidence from the inspection indicated that the school is in a clearly stronger position, because of improving leadership, management and teaching, to raise pupils' attainment and achievement to significantly higher levels.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 11 May 2009

- Raise standards and achievement in writing throughout the school and in mathematics in Key Stage 2.
- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve particularly in writing and in Key Stage 2 so that they fully consolidate pupils' numeracy skills to improve mathematical problem-solving skills.
- Implement more rigorous systems to track the progress of different groups of pupils.
- Ensure leaders better relate to and communicate with parents, especially in following up their suggestions and concerns and in informing them about changes to school organisation and routines.