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19 May 2011

Mrs J Young
Headteacher
St Stephens's Church of England Primary School Blackburn
Robinson Street
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 5PE

Dear Mrs Young,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Stephens' Church of England Primary School Blackburn

Following my visit with Mrs Marguerite Murphy, HMI, to your school on 17 and 18 May 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 29 Nov 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen.

Yours sincerely

Mr Adrian Guy
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 29 Nov 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment effectively to plan learning for pupils of all ability levels in Key Stage 2
 - providing higher levels of challenge for more-able pupils throughout the school
 - ensuring opportunities for pupils to contribute to their learning by developing their speaking and listening skills
 - maximising the effectiveness of teaching assistants by extending current good practice more widely.

- Ensure leaders drive school improvement with a greater sense of urgency by:
 - using more accurate benchmarks for measuring pupils' outcomes in order to evaluate the school's performance
 - identifying sharp and measurable success criteria for school development within tighter timescales
 - providing training for members of the governing body so that their responsibilities can be fully and effectively implemented.

Special measures: monitoring of St Stephens's Church of England Primary School Blackburn

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 May 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and carried out lesson observations with school leaders, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, leadership team and other staff, the School Improvement Partner, a representative from the local authority, a school improvement consultant, a group of governors and a group of pupils.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2010 the headteacher has retired. The governing body, with the support of the local authority, has recently seconded an executive headteacher from another local school until a permanent appointment can be made. Following the last inspection, one additional local authority governor and one additional diocesan governor have been appointed.

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

Pupils' attainment remains below average in reading, mathematics and especially in writing. Inspection evidence supports the school's view that attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is unlikely to rise significantly from last year's levels or meet the school's targets for 2011. However, there are signs that progress is improving, particularly where teaching is stronger. Where progress is strongest, this is because lessons have well planned tasks and activities to meet all pupils' needs and learning is carefully structured to include appropriate support and challenge. Observations by inspectors show that, where there are improvements in teaching and learning, these are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. For example, in one lesson pupils received 'top tips' from their teacher and were very clear about what they needed to do to improve. However, this picture of improvement is inconsistent across the school. For example, in other lessons, inspectors observed occasions where pupils gave one-word responses and opportunities to extend and explain these were missed.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress - satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are generally confident and engaged in their learning, which is characterised by positive relationships and their continued good behaviour. Older pupils who spoke to the lead inspector said that there is more time for teaching and less time is wasted. They were aware of their learning targets and felt their behaviour had improved. They were also aware of the need to improve attendance. The school acknowledges that attendance is not

improving and is working to reduce the number of pupils who have a large amount of time off school and thereby prevent the negative impact this can have on their progress.

The effectiveness of provision

Many teachers are responding well to the focused, whole-staff training and individual support provided by local authority advisers and consultants. The provision of challenge for the more-able pupils has been part of the focus of training to develop the consistency of teachers' planning.

In the best lessons, effective learning is characterised by:

- appropriately planned tasks and activities to meet the needs of all pupils
- clearly communicated learning intentions which include scaffolding and challenge appropriately
- the use of assessment to support learning to ensure that each child's needs are individually met, including higher-attaining pupils who are provided with considerably challenging tasks
- opportunities for pupils to contribute their own question for investigation
- good use of open questioning to promote verbal responses
- high levels of enjoyment and challenge
- teachers' high expectations and brisk pace
- effective use of skilled teaching assistants with clear focus and understanding of how to move pupils on in their learning.

However, in less effective lessons:

- teachers occasionally miss pupils' errors which identify a gap in their knowledge or understanding
- adults are too focused on ensuring pupils complete activities rather than ensuring they extend and apply their learning
- some pupils' verbal responses are quite restricted and there is insufficient challenge and encouragement to ensure that pupils expand upon these limited answers
- teaching assistants are not effectively deployed, are too passive and lack focus
- high levels of support from additional adults prohibits independent learning.

Leaders are fully aware that there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching and inspectors' judgements are similar to those of the school. However, the proportion of good teaching and learning is beginning to rise. Speaking and listening is not yet used consistently across all classes to enhance pupils' understanding and communication of what they have learnt. Similarly, there is disparity in the quality and effective use of assessment to support learning, particularly in the marking of pupils' work. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the use of observations to identify progress and gaps in children's learning and inform future planning is underdeveloped.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The seconded headteacher and the senior leadership team have used the support of local authority advisers and consultants well. They acknowledge the need to continue to do so as they develop their drive, ambition and capacity to secure school improvement. The school has implemented a system for tracking pupils' attainment and holds meetings to monitor pupils' progress. These are at an early stage of development as is the accuracy of the assessment data which informs them. The supportive staff recognise that improvement is needed and are keen to succeed. The headteacher and the governing body are reviewing the existing school improvement plans to ensure these are shared widely and understood by all staff. This will also mean that monitoring and accountability can be more rigorous and progress with priorities accurately evaluated.

Roles and responsibilities for senior and middle leaders are being clarified and new structures for ensuring accountability are being put in place. Leaders are aware of the need to monitor the impact of initiatives and ensure they are implemented consistently in all classes across the school. To do this, the headteacher and school improvement officer recognise the need for additional support, particularly in relation to developing the skills needed to monitor effectively and observe lessons.

Members of the governing body have recently received training so that they are more aware of their roles and responsibilities and are motivated to achieve the improvement required. They are suitably focussed on ensuring the appointment of a substantive headteacher.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on areas for improvement:

- Ensure leaders drive school improvement with a greater sense of urgency - satisfactory

External support

The school is receiving a high level of support and guidance from the local authority. The school's improvement officer provides additional support and challenge in regular meetings with the school, helping to agree priorities for further improvement. The local authority's statement of support and action plan now contain helpful success criteria and targets and is fit for purpose. Visits by the School Improvement Partner have charted the developments at the school and highlighted the need for more rigorous tracking of pupils' attainment for which the school now has systems in place.