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25 April 2013

Mr T Bennett
Interim executive headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
Peel Grove
London
E2 9LR

Dear Mr Bennett

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Andrew Lyons, additional inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 April 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 September 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.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Tower Hamlets.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching in English and mathematics by making sure that all teachers:
 - make better use of assessments to plan lessons that meet the needs and abilities of all pupils
 - check pupils' progress closely to ensure that all pupils are given good levels of academic challenge and support
 - mark pupils' work effectively so that pupils know what they need to do to improve
 - have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - provide better support in lessons for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, so that their work is more accurately matched to their needs
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills when learning in other subjects.
- Strengthen the capacity of leaders and managers to improve how well the school does by:
 - making sure that the quality of teaching is rigorously checked so that it leads to improvements in pupils' achievement
 - improving the quality of teaching by using a range of strategies, including good practice, coaching and mentoring
 - introducing improvement plans that have a sharper focus on raising standards in English and mathematics, including setting more challenging academic targets
 - checking, reviewing and evaluating the school's work more rigorously.
- Increase the impact of the governing body on school improvement by making sure that:
 - it holds school leaders robustly to account for improving the school's performance
 - it becomes more actively involved in deciding the school's future
 - it uses specific funding such as the pupil premium wisely so that those pupils who it is intended to benefit achieve well.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23–24 April 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, two representatives from the local authority and a representative from the local diocese. Inspectors also heard lower-ability pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6.

Context

Since the previous inspection, two senior appointments have been made. An inclusion manager and a senior leader for teaching, learning and mathematics were appointed in April 2013. Two teachers were also appointed; one is to cover the maternity leave of the Nursery teacher. A class teacher is due to leave the school at the end of July.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is rising as pupils are beginning to make faster progress. However, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not progressing quickly. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 have been well supported to attain levels that are just below national expectations. The school leaders are targeting pupils who are capable of achieving high grades, although few have achieved this so far. The focused effort to improve reading in all year groups has been successful. Year 6 results are predicted to be above the national average. Reading levels are improving the fastest. Lower-ability readers demonstrate effective ways to decipher text. However, pupils' attainment is not rising as quickly in mathematics or writing. In lessons, pupils are given time to discuss their work and their understanding of tasks set. 'Talk partners' are used well to deepen pupils' learning. However, discussions in literacy lessons do not always give pupils time to produce written work. There are increased instances where pupils are producing extended pieces of writing in subjects other than English and mathematics. This has been particularly successful in religious education. However, little progress has been made to improve opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills.

The quality of teaching

The drive to reduce inadequate lessons has had some success. Teaching over time is improving, although some inadequate teaching remains. Planning by teachers is undertaken in more detail and uses pupil assessment data as a starting point. This has worked well to group pupils who are of similar ability, so work is more appropriate. However, too often, teachers' plans are not ambitious enough to challenge pupils, as expectations are too low. As a result, some pupils sit idly waiting

for guidance to move on, especially the more able. On occasions, work for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is pitched too low. Some good examples were seen of teachers using sharp questions to move learning on more quickly. For example in a sound Year 4 writing lesson, the teacher used appropriate terms such as 'synonyms' to deepen pupils' understanding of what they should write about. They responded well to this and were keen to say what they had learnt.

Sometimes, questions were too closed and stopped pupils from fully explaining their answers. This was commonly seen in mathematics lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants steadfastly attach themselves to their 'focus' groups, which means the progress of other pupils working independently is not accurately checked. Marking has improved from the previous inspection. The structured scheme of highlighting successful work as well as areas that need to be improved, is having a good impact on learning. Pupils are starting to understand how well they are progressing. Those in older years are given good opportunities to respond to comments made. However, marking in mathematics is not as good as in English. Generally, marking in this subject lacks clear guidance about next steps needed for pupils to improve their work. There is available support in lessons for those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Individual support plans for some have not yet been devised. As a result, the individual needs of pupils who require intensive school support are not always clear.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and pupils spoken to say there are fewer disruptions to lessons because of poor behaviour. Behaviour is improving, and the sanctions and rewards in place are ensuring pupils behave more responsibly. The playground is appropriately supervised, and pupils say at play and lunchtime, staff address poor behaviour well. However, there are still instances of poor behaviour occurring in lessons, especially when teaching is weak. Attendance remains at an average level, and is being monitored well by staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The senior team has improved pupils' achievement and parents say leaders are more visible and approachable. The executive headteacher is establishing a culture of better achievement. Achievement data is checked thoroughly and the support given by the local authority has ensured that attainment results are realistic. Although the two new members of the senior team have only been in post for a matter of days, they have a clear understanding of where improvements are required. The inclusion manager has made a strong start, by examining the provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The next step is to assess the impact of the support given to this group. The second priority identified is to devise support plans for those requiring intensive help, to ensure they receive the right support.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage need further support to enable the learning environment and children's progress to improve more quickly. The 'raising achievement plan' identifies most aspects needing attention, but it lacks detailed actions to improve mathematics or writing. The senior team recognises this is required as a matter of urgency. The local authority has robustly undertaken detailed reviews of teaching and learning. Senior leaders have used this to develop individual improvement plans for teachers. However, this is not improving teaching quickly enough; there is still a significant proportion of teaching that is inadequate. The newly formed Interim Executive Board is made up of experienced and knowledgeable members. They accurately detail the improvements that have been made and are suitably checking the school's work. A good review has taken place of achievement and how the pupil premium is being spent. More in-depth checking is needed to accelerate the improvements in teaching, mathematics and writing. Members are also looking at other possible partnerships with local schools to support St John's.

External support

The significant support of the local authority has contributed extremely well to the increase in pupils' achievement. Good guidance has been given to leaders to ensure that attainment data is accurate. Effective help has been given to coach and mentor staff to improve the weakest teaching and to develop leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The authority's detailed checks ensure that the school receives appropriate interventions. The level of support is very high and it is unclear what capacity exists for senior leaders to drive improvements. The guidance from the diocese has contributed well to improving the weakest teaching. The partnership with the local school has not developed as well as planned. There are missed opportunities for the partner school to contribute towards the sharing of good teaching practice, coaching and mentoring of staff.