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31 January 2014

Mrs Holcombe and Mrs Jarvis
Interim co-headteachers
St James Church of England Junior School
Upton Street
Gloucester
Gloucestershire
GL1 4JU

Dear Mrs Holcombe and Mrs Jarvis

Special measures monitoring inspection of St James Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 January 2014 with Peter Clifton, Additional inspector, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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 of the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures

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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by ensuring teachers:
 - plan learning activities that make pupils of all abilities think hard, especially the more able
 - provide effective support for those pupils who need specific extra help, especially those with special educational needs
 - do not talk for too long and allow pupils to start their work promptly so they can find things out for themselves
 - explain to pupils what they need to do to be successful in lessons and in order to produce their best work.

- Improve pupils' achievement, especially in writing, by:
 - providing more opportunities to for pupils to write at length in order to practise and extend their writing skills
 - making sure teachers demonstrate to pupils what they need to do to develop their writing skills
 - teaching pupils higher-level reading skills such as inference and deduction
 - giving pupils sufficient opportunities to respond to their marking and make the necessary improvements to their work.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that improvement plans have precise targets for pupils' progress and for improving the quality of teaching, and that they are implemented effectively and checked regularly
 - setting clear expectations and guidance for teachers about what is expected in lessons and checking robustly that they are being followed
 - establishing an efficient and effective system for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils
 - carrying out an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
 - developing the skills and knowledge of the governing body to enable governors to check the school's work for themselves more effectively.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 January 2014

Evidence

During the inspection visit, meetings were held with both of you, and the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Discussions were also held with the lead teachers for writing and assessment. The school's single central record and the school's updated action plans were reviewed. Teachers' planning and pupils' exercise books were scrutinised during the 10 lesson observations along with a separate selection of pupils' writing books.

Context

Since my last inspection visit several staff have been on sick leave including one on long-term sick leave. The governing body has been reconstituted and there are currently eight members. From 21 January 2014, Mrs Jarvis became the joint interim co-headteacher for two days a week, with Mrs Holcombe leading over the other three days. The future nature of the school and its leadership beyond the 2014 spring term remains uncertain.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement remains low across the school because of the continuing variability of teaching and legacy of underachievement. The lack of staff stability has had a significantly negative impact on the rates of progress that some groups of pupils have made since December 2013. Where staffing is stable and the teachers know the pupils' learning needs well, pupils are making the best progress.

School data, evidence in pupils' books and work seen during the inspection showed that the initiatives to improve reading and writing are beginning to be successful. These are key areas that were identified for improvement. The school is fully aware that more needs to be done to ensure that this work is sustained. The achievement gaps between boys' and girls' writing remains too wide; boys have much catching up to do.

Leaders and teachers of pupils in Year 3 have reported that they do not feel confident about the levels reportedly attained by children when they join the school. There is a large, unexplained discrepancy between the higher achievement levels awarded to pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 and the test results conducted by the school when they join it in Year 3. There has been some joint sampling of work with local infant schools, but more robust moderation is needed. Also, there needs to be further investigation to identify the cause of the discrepancy so that the schools can plan together to reduce the difference.

The quality of teaching

During this inspection some good teaching and learning were seen in English and mathematics lessons. However, overall, the quality varies too much. There is too little high-quality teaching on a sufficiently regular basis to ensure that pupils reach the standards of which they are capable.

In general, lessons are planned so that pupils will have a range of tasks that are interesting to do. In the weakest lessons not enough thought is given to ensure that the activities are designed to either consolidate or move pupils' learning forward. On these occasions, while the work 'fills a gap' in the timetable pupils learn very little and their behaviour dips.

Too little attention is given to planning what additional adults will do throughout lessons to help the pupils make the best progress. These support staff are generally given specific tasks to work through with small groups of pupils, but they are not frequently used as much or as well as they could be, to help drive pupils' progress. For example, at the end of lessons they were observed sitting and listening to the teacher questioning the pupils and not supporting learning.

Where teaching requires improvement is it often because the work is set only to meet the needs of middle-ability pupils. As a consequence, pupils of higher or lower attainment have work that is either too hard or too easy, resulting in limited progress for them. Conversely, where teaching is better the needs of all pupils are planned for. For example, in a mathematics lesson a more able pupil was given an extended task at the end of the lesson rather than joining classmates on the carpet doing work that the pupil had already demonstrated they could easily do.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

When teaching is strong pupils listen in rapt attention and work hard for extended periods of time. When staff do not know the pupils well enough or fail to adapt the activities to ensure pupils are learning, pupils start to daydream or fidget. Some pupils are resistant to being in school to learn and on occasions are very reluctant to pay due attention to adults. Staff manage these situations well, and on the whole the learning of others is not disturbed, but these poor pupil attitudes can sap staff time and energy.

Mrs Holcombe has made sure that the school is much less cluttered, more organised and a pleasant place to be. Displays in classrooms consistently follow the school's policies and provide good quality memory aids for pupils. However, the temperature in several of the classrooms and the school library varies from being uncomfortably hot and stuffy to being too cold. These extremes in temperatures severely hamper pupils' concentration and progress. During the inspection pupils were seen to be

getting very sleepy and lacking attention because of the excessive heat. The teachers did their best to mitigate this effect, but the rooms' ventilation systems were not appropriate or sufficient to cool them to a suitable temperature. These problems have been on-going for a number of years; this is far too long. The single central record meets requirements and the school works hard to keep pupils safe and secure.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school improvement plans are clear to read and the actions taken by the school are easily measured. They enable others to check if the actions were the right ones and if they were completed on time. They link well with other records kept by the school and help identify strengths and areas that need to be improved more quickly. The plans show that to date the changes Mrs Holcombe has made and the measures she has implemented have been correct. The judgements made coincide with the evidence seen during this inspection visit. For example, the consistent use of methods, such as RUCSAC (read, underline, choose, solve, answer, check), is successful throughout the school in helping pupils learn to solve mathematical problems.

As the interim headteacher, Mrs Holcombe has made sure that the day-to-day running of the school is smooth. Supply staff have been employed to bridge gaps caused by permanent staff absence. However, the absences and short-term contracts have meant that she has not been able to improve the quality of education provided by the school as swiftly as when she started her role. The addition of Mrs Jarvis to the leadership team should permit more time to be spent on strategic developments and enable further support for middle leaders to drive improvements in pupils' progress.

External and internal training has been focused on the key aspects that need to improve, and sustain, the outcomes for pupils; more is planned. Teaching staff have been given clear messages about what needs to be done and they are following this through. Staff newer to teaching have bravely risen to the occasion, taking on the work of senior staff in their absence and helping to lead key areas in the school. They and other middle leaders need more external help and support to ensure that all teachers are held to account for the amount of progress made by the pupils that they teach, so that pupils achieve as well as they can. In particular, the frequency with which some teachers mark pupils' work and the quality of the feedback given to the pupils to let them know what they need to do to improve are not good enough.

The sickness absence of staff, the amount of work that needs to be done to improve the school and the uncertainty about the school's future have caused staff confidence to dip since my last visit. The whole school community needs to pull

together to ensure that the challenges faced by staff do not have a destructive impact on staff morale and well-being.

External Support

The school has received a variety of support from the local authority and local schools. The improvements in the progress that pupils are now making in their reading and writing are testament to the successful impact of this support. The school's focus for this term is mathematics. The school needs much more support to improve the progress that pupils are making in mathematics across the school and in English for a group of pupils in Year 6.

The governing body and local authority have not yet determined the leadership of the school from spring 2014. Their lack of a definitive strategic plan for the school, including its terms of reference and leadership, is severely delaying and restricting the capacity of the school to be removed from special measures. These uncertainties need to be urgently resolved.