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Mrs Michaela Underwood
Headteacher
Great Marsden St John's Church of England Primary School
Trent Road
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 0NX

Dear Mrs Underwood

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

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 September 2014, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint up to one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection, provided that any teacher appointed receives an appropriate programme of induction and support.

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 Interim Executive Board, the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn and the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is all at least good by:
 - providing staff with opportunities to observe high-quality teaching so they recognise what constitutes good and outstanding teaching
 - making sure teachers apply the advice they receive on how to improve the quality of their own teaching
 - matching learning tasks more effectively to pupils' wide-ranging abilities
 - teachers using day-to-day assessment to adapt their teaching to the changing needs of pupils in lessons
 - eradicating low-level disruption by making sure that pupils are more actively engaged and interested in lessons
 - improving the marking of pupils' work so that it informs pupils about how to improve their work and then allowing pupils time to respond to this guidance.

- Accelerate rates of progress in all subjects, particularly in mathematics, so that the achievement of pupils of all abilities is at least good by:
 - improving pupils' numeracy skills to ensure that they have a secure base for further learning and providing opportunities for pupils to apply these skills to real-life situations and in subjects other than numeracy
 - improving standards in reading by strengthening younger pupils' knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and increasing opportunities for pupils to read more widely.

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, so that there is a greater collective capacity to improve the effectiveness of the school by:
 - ensuring that action plans have a sharp focus on improvement and are evaluated regularly
 - implementing fully the appraisal of individual teachers' performance so they are held rigorously to account to ensure that all pupils make progress that is at least good
 - developing the skills of subject leaders in checking the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects so they can provide helpful feedback to teachers and then ensure that teachers make effective use of this advice
 - updating regularly the newly introduced tracking system so prompt action can be taken to support pupils who are in danger of underachieving
 - increasing governors' involvement in checking the school's performance so they can identify strengths and areas for development, have a clear and realistic understanding of school effectiveness and are able to hold teachers to account
 - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 16 to 17 September 2014.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work. He visited every class to observe teaching and learning and to look at work in pupils' books. On all of these occasions he was accompanied by the headteacher. The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to pupils' progress, the monitoring records of leaders, governance and behaviour and safety. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the school's leadership team, the executive headteacher and representatives of the local authority and diocese. In addition, the inspector met with six parents, eight pupils and with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB).

Context

The most significant change has been the Secretary of State's appointment of an IEB comprising five members to provide governance for the school. In addition, two new teachers have been appointed: one in Year 1 and the other in Year 4. Furthermore, a teacher has returned from maternity leave and has responsibility for Year 5.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The improved results at Year 1 and Year 2 reported in the previous monitoring inspection are being built on in the Year 2 and 3 classes respectively. Across the school, work in pupils' books covering the last four weeks of the summer term and the first week of the autumn term show improvements in the standards of spelling, grammar and punctuation. This is because teachers' expectations are consistently higher than in the past. Also improving is pupils' learning in mathematics. This is a direct result of clearer guidance given by leaders to teachers about the sequence of learning so that pupils build on previous knowledge and skills. It is also because pupils are having more time to complete corrections and learn from any mistakes made. However, pupils' learning in this subject is sometimes hindered by teachers not always using mathematical vocabulary correctly.

The provisional results of the Year 6 national assessments in 2014 were as expected, both in terms of standards attained and progress made: the government's floor standards were not met. Nevertheless, there were signs of hope for future improvement. A small number of pupils made better than expected progress, including moving from a well-below average level in Key Stage 1 to reaching national expectations by the time they left for secondary school. In addition, the proportion of more able pupils gaining the higher Level 5 in spelling, grammar and punctuation rose from 20% in 2013 to 33% this year.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve in Years 1 to 6. Greater stability in staffing and a clear steer from leaders is ensuring consistently higher expectations of pupils. Routines are becoming established and pupils increasingly know what is expected of them. In the early years, however, purposeful learning is not a consistent feature. While assessments have been made of children and next steps identified, these steps are not always focussed sharply enough on what children are to do. This is in contrast to the targets for older pupils, including those with special needs, which increasingly provide adults and pupils with clear ways forward.

In the previous monitoring inspection, learning over time was best when these features were routinely evident: good quality questioning and prompting that allowed pupils to work together to find answers and make good progress in their learning; practical learning that engaged the interest of pupils; the setting of challenging work; clear expectations of what pupils were to do and learn; and opportunities to apply writing skills across the curriculum. Since then, these features have become more and more routine across Years 1 to 6. Pupils are responding well to this better quality teaching.

Teachers' assessment of pupils' achievement continues to strengthen. Regular marking and the now almost consistent use of 'fix it' time is helping teachers identify what pupils can and cannot do. Teachers are using this information increasingly well to plan learning for their classes and, where appropriate, groups or individuals requiring specific support. Pupils learning English as an additional language are receiving good, bespoke support to develop their vocabulary.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Good improvements have been made to raise attendance. In 2013/14, attendance stood at 96.4% - a figure that is above the national average. Already this term, attendance stands at over 99%. The rewards for attending well, the 'fivers' for example, are paying dividends. These incentives are appreciated by the pupils.

Pupils continue to be polite and well mannered. Those spoken with report confidence in the school's ability to keep them safe. If standards of behaviour occasionally slip in lessons, teachers act quickly. At playtimes and lunchtimes, pupils play sensibly because routines are well established and pupils are clear what is and what is not acceptable. Such routines, at the time of this monitoring inspection, had not been as well established in the early years.

The school's records for safeguarding pupils are up to date. Improvements have been made to the way any incidences of poor behaviour are recorded so that lessons can be learned. There is still scope, however, to record that parents of pupils involved have been informed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school's capacity to improve continues to grow. In the short time the IEB has been operational, it has gleaned accurate information from the headteacher in order to have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. While the increased skills base of the former governing body is no longer in existence, members' efforts to improve the school were paying dividends. The skills base and expertise of the IEB make it well placed to build on the former governing body's work to gain the necessary improvements required.

The headteacher continues to provide clear leadership. Her positive impact on the school was praised by parents who spoke to the inspector during this visit. The growing strength of the wider leadership is driving through the necessary improvements, including better teaching and sharper interventions for pupils needing the most support. These leaders are rightly, as their skills are developing, taking on more responsibility. They are assisting the headteacher well in holding their colleagues and each other to account for the performance of pupils in the school. Leadership throughout the school is also developing well. A teacher, for example, has revamped the school's website, making it attractive and easy to navigate.

The leadership team knows the school's strengths well. It is equally clear about what needs improving and how to go about it. Particular focus, for example, is being given to the current Year 6 pupils, who are now the remaining class in the school where the legacy of underachievement is most keenly felt. Substantial work has been undertaken by the diocese in partnership with the school with this class to ensure that the pupils understand increasingly well the characteristics of a successful learner. Furthermore, bespoke support and challenge have been and continues to be given to teachers whose performance has raised concerns.

External support

The local authority, diocese and executive headteacher have continued to provide good support and challenge to the headteacher and school leaders. This has been particularly evident most recently with the change in the arrangements for governors. Quite correctly, more and more is being demanded by the school's leaders as they demonstrate their growing ability to stand on their own feet.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve provision in the early years by ensuring that:
 - children are clear about the routines they are to follow
 - purposeful learning is the norm
 - next steps identified through ongoing assessments are always sharply focused on what children are to do, to demonstrate good learning and development.

The next monitoring inspection will focus on how well the improvements and actions reported are leading to better pupil achievement. It will also focus on what improvements have been made in the early years.