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Mandy Lloyd
Interim headteacher
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Gloucestershire
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Dear Mandy Lloyd

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Anthony's Free School

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 2016, 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 that 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 that took place in May 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2015.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - planning lessons which inspire and challenge pupils to achieve high standards and which build on what pupils already know and understand
 - ensuring pupils improve their work as a result of teachers' marking
 - checking that pupils understand the guidance they have been given and are learning from this advice
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that children in the early years are fully supported to develop their learning in mathematics and writing.

- Improve pupils' progress and raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school by:
 - rapidly improving the quality of teaching of these subjects
 - ensuring that pupils are able to apply mathematical skills to develop their thinking and reasoning across the curriculum

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all teachers respond to training and advice by improving their practice
 - providing training to develop leaders' skills so that leaders play a leading role in driving improvements in teaching and learning, including by challenging weak practice
 - making sure leaders are skilled in using assessment information to set work which enables all pupils to make good progress
 - ensuring parents receive appropriate information about their child's achievement and progress
 - ensuring governors hold leaders to account for improving the school by checking the quality and accuracy of the information they receive about the school's performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 December 2016

Evidence

I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the most recent post-inspection action plan, the single central register and recruitment details. I held discussions with you and the interim deputy headteacher to review the improvements made since my last monitoring visit. I met governors, including the chair of governors. I also met with all Year 6 pupils and spoke to parents in the playground. I had a telephone discussion with a representative from the Department for Education. Together with you and the interim deputy headteacher, I observed pupils at work and looked at a sample of their books.

Context

The current part-time interim headteacher started on 1 July 2016 and worked alongside the former interim headteacher, who had been seconded from Forest High School. A new interim part-time deputy headteacher was appointed in August 2016 and shares leadership responsibilities with the interim headteacher.

Very recently all governors, with the exception of the chair of governors, resigned. Two new governors have been quickly secured. The school is in the process of recruiting to fill the governor vacancies which remain.

The Department for Education is continuing to look for longer-term support for the school.

There has been a reduction in the number of classes. Currently, there is a Reception class which works closely with Nursery and three mixed classes: Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4 and Years 5 and 6. There has been an increase in the school roll from 88 to 105.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and the interim deputy headteacher have brought with you a wealth of primary expertise and provided the school community with a clear, strategic direction. Consequently, staff morale has significantly improved and the vast majority of parents have greater confidence in the school. Pupils report that they feel much more settled with the consistency that you and your interim deputy headteacher bring as school leaders.

You have swiftly tackled issues relating to the teachers' basic pay and conditions and introduced a performance management system which ensures that staff are accountable for pupils' outcomes. Statutory policies and procedures have been reviewed and new systems have been introduced to comply with regulations. You highlighted weaknesses in the systems used to manage the finances of the school.

Recently, a specialist company has taken over payroll responsibilities and they will support the role of the newly appointed business manager. These arrangements are now providing support for you as a leader and ensuring that you have an accurate picture of school finances to support further improvements.

At the time of my last visit, I described the early years provision as 'stark and unstimulating'. Since then, it has been transformed into a lively and engaging environment where young children are eager to learn. This has been skilfully achieved by using the skills of one of your teachers who has extensive early years expertise.

You have adapted well to the changing needs of the pupils who attend St Anthony's. Currently one quarter of the pupils are in the early stages of using English as an additional language. You have used a teacher's knowledge and skills effectively to support these pupils to acquire a basic vocabulary. The support you are also providing for families new to the area is also impressive. For example, parents appreciated a recent coffee morning where they shared their own Christmas traditions with each other.

You have both prioritised the implementation of a curriculum that is meaningful and appropriate to the different age groups. A successful 'superhero' topic in every class kick-started the new academic year well. The introduction of extra-curricular activities, such as archery, cross-country and gymnastics, has really engaged the pupils much more in school life. A recent outdoor learning event in the local forest stimulated all the pupils, particularly those who find physical activities more engaging.

You and your interim deputy headteacher have a very strong awareness of many of the dangers of the school site. You maintain vigilance in making sure that only the safest parts of the building are accessible to the pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

You and your interim deputy headteacher have introduced a new system for tracking and checking pupils' progress. Teachers have been appropriately trained in its use and this is enabling them to plan more accurately for the needs of individuals. The regular checks made by you and your interim deputy headteacher ensure that teaching and learning is consistent for all groups of pupils.

It is clear from the work in pupils' books that teacher expectations are steadily improving. You have introduced a consistent approach to the way in which pupils present their work and this has raised both teachers' and pupils' expectations.

Teaching and learning in the early years has significantly improved as a result of the transformation of the provision. Activities are carefully planned and selected to enable children to take an active part in their own learning. The outdoor area supports well the development of key skills such as speaking, reading, writing and

mathematics. 'Santa's Workshop' helped a group of boys to cut, fold and handle large shapes as they wrapped gifts ready for delivery by Father Christmas. The outdoor café, which was supporting the children's social development, looked most welcoming on a cold winter's morning. Adults use their time well to model learning. They carefully check and record what every child is learning.

Those pupils who have recently started and are in the very early stages of using English as an additional language receive strong support in small groups from adults who have a secure understanding of their needs. The focus on not only learning key words but also making use of them in sentences is helping these pupils to use their newly acquired skills to access activities back in their classrooms.

During our visit into classes, I noted that all teaching assistants were well-deployed and clearly supporting pupils' learning. They were having a good impact on the pupils' development of knowledge and skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You, your interim deputy headteacher and I noted that when we visited classes, all pupils were keen to learn and enthusiastic about their learning. They were concentrating and persevering with their learning. The work in books we looked at showed that pupils take careful note of the feedback that their teachers give them and use it well to support the next steps in their learning. They now take pride in the presentation of their work.

Pupils are very clear about your core values of 'belief, effort, strength and trust' and know this means they must always do their 'BEST'. A new system of rewards has had a positive impact on behaviour during lessons and at break and lunchtimes.

A recent visit from Andy Lewis, the gold Paralympian, had a very positive influence on pupils' personal development. The pupils were clearly inspired by this sportsman and recognised the commitment required for such success.

Older pupils are delighted with the new way that you organised the selection of the head girl and boy. They found the application and interview process stimulating and were pleased that this recruitment method also resulted in the much-coveted appointment of healthy school and sports leaders. They talk of a much more 'equal feel' to the school and enjoy the team spirit which has emerged since you and your deputy headteacher arrived.

The attendance and punctuality of a small number of pupils remain an issue. You are sensibly building up positive relationships with the offending families but are fully aware that you need to take further action to improve their attendance rates. You explained that you were exploring the possibility of offering a breakfast club for all pupils. I emphasised the importance of recording carefully individual cases of concern about absence and noting the actions taken.

Outcomes for pupils

You explained that in the past information submitted to the Department for Education had not always been accurate. Hence, published information, particularly in relation to disadvantaged groups, is inaccurate. Nevertheless, you agree that last year pupils did not make sufficient progress in Year 2, particularly in mathematics, where they had extensive gaps in their knowledge and skills. You are making sure that the current Year 2 have additional support so that any gaps are filled rapidly.

Given the poor teaching of phonics seen on previous monitoring visits, it was not surprising that over two-thirds of Year 1 pupils failed to meet the expected level in the phonics screening check. You and your deputy headteacher have wasted no time in introducing a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics across the school. By skilfully assessing the phonic level of knowledge and skills across all of the classes, every teacher and teaching assistant takes a specific group of pupils and focuses on their particular needs and stages of development.

The 2016 national tests for Year 6 pupils indicated average outcomes, which reflect the rapid progress they made during the latter part of the last academic year. Current Year 6 pupils continue to develop their skills well and the greater focus on extending the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is having a positive impact on their outcomes.

Assessment information collected from when the children first started school shows that children in the early years have made good progress. This is because of the improved provision and specialist teaching.

External support

You are making effective use of the strong links that you and your interim deputy headteacher have with other local schools. These are being used well to support improvements in teaching and learning. St Briavels Primary School has shared their approach to the teaching of religious education and provided guidance for the development of the early years provision. Help from Berry Hill Primary has been welcomed by your new special educational needs leader. Redbrook Primary has worked effectively with the school to establish a systematic approach to the teaching of reading and Coalway Junior School has supported you in developing a new system which tracks pupil progress. Dene Magna School has also supported your teachers to develop their questioning skills. Weekly visits to Severnbanks Primary enable the youngest children to learn in a safe, outdoor wooded area. The school remains in close contact with a representative from the Department for Education who maintains an overview on school improvement.