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Mrs J Naylor
Acting Headteacher
The Henry Prince Church of England First School
Mayfield
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Dear Mrs Naylor

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Henry Prince Church of England First School

Following my visit to your school on 4-5 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly Qualified Teachers may not 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 governors, the diocese of Lichfield and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of The Henry Prince Church of England First School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3-4 November 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, subject leaders, leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The substantive headteacher was absent at the time of the last inspection and resigned her post at the end of September 2009. The headteacher from a local school was appointed as temporary part-time executive headteacher until the current acting headteacher started her duties at the beginning of the autumn term 2009. The governors are currently preparing for the appointment of a new substantive headteacher. Due to falling roles, one full-time teacher left the school and was replaced with a part-time teacher who began her duties in September 2009. The teacher of pupils in Key Stage 1 has resigned and will leave the school at the end of this term. The governors are currently seeking a teacher to fill this vacant position.

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

The 2009 end of Key Stage 1 teacher assessments showed that pupils' attainment was low in reading, writing and mathematics and was considerably lower than in 2008. No pupils reached the higher level 3. Despite the implementation of several initiatives to improve pupils' writing, the school's own data show that pupils' attainment in writing remains low in all year groups. Although there are no data available to show pupils' current attainment in reading and mathematics, work in pupils' books and discussions with pupils about their work show that attainment in these subjects also remains low.

No data were available to show improvement in pupils' progress since the last inspection. However, other inspection evidence shows that pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 remains too slow. The work recently undertaken by the school to implement a more accurate method of monitoring pupils' progress is not yet developed well enough to allow the school to analyse the performance of specific groups of pupils and match work closely to pupils' needs. Consequently, most groups of pupils continue to receive insufficient challenge and the large majority of pupils do not have the basic skills to enable them to make better progress in their learning.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve standards and achievement in writing across the school by: improving the teaching of letter formation, sounds and words; ensuring that pupils apply their writing skills across all subjects; and informing pupils about what they need to do to reach their targets - inadequate.

- Accelerate the rates of progress of all pupils and ensure they are consistent across the school by analysing the performance of specific groups so that teaching can address their needs - inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Although several parents expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour in lessons, this view was not supported in observations during the inspection or in local authority monitoring visits. Most pupils show positive attitudes to their work, try to do their best and are eager to learn. On the occasions when some pupils are restless and inattentive in lessons, it is because activities fail to engage their interest, the pace of learning is slow and aspirations for the pupils' achievements are too low.

The effectiveness of provision

The local authority monitoring shows that, since the last inspection, there have been some improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in all Key Stages. Significant improvements have been made in all aspects of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. More detailed planning, more accurate assessments and better quality teaching and learning are helping Nursery and Reception children to make better progress. However, the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stages 1 and 2 remains fragile and has not improved fast enough.

The school has recently implemented an improved system for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress, and teachers are beginning to use this information to help plan work for the pupils. However, it is in its very early stages of development and, in too many lessons, teachers' expectations are too low and work is not matched well enough to pupils' different starting points and capabilities. Consequently, many pupils, especially the more able, are frequently given work to complete which is too easy.

In many lessons, the teachers are not clear enough about what they want pupils to learn and do not plan carefully enough the small steps which help ensure effective learning. Consequently, teachers are unable to give pupils accurate enough feedback on how to improve their work. A system of target-setting has recently been

introduced and some pupils are aware that they have targets which will help them to move forward in their learning. However, this is not yet embedded and the targets are not consistently matched to pupils' different capabilities. In some lessons, the pace of learning is slow and pupils lose concentration.

Teachers are beginning to take opportunities for pupils to practise their skills of writing in lessons other than literacy. However, this is not yet embedded into the planning so that opportunities for pupils to improve their basic skills are not often taken. Work originally undertaken to improve pupils' knowledge, understanding and use of letters and sounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 has recently been extended to include pupils in Key Stage 2. Greater emphasis is now placed on pupils' forming letters correctly to improve their writing. However, all these initiatives are still at early stages of development and have not yet had an impact on pupils' achievement in any aspect of literacy.

The acting headteacher has taken responsibility for improving the management, support and guidance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Records are now more organised and teachers are becoming more aware of the specific needs of individual pupils. However, the improvements have only recently been undertaken and the impact on pupils' achievement is limited.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure teachers use assessment information to match their teaching to pupils' abilities and give feedback that helps pupils know what they have to do to improve - inadequate.
- Improve the management, support and guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities - inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

With support from the local authority, the previous part-time executive headteacher and the current acting headteacher have instigated a number of initiatives to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. However, the instability and lack of consistency of leadership since just prior to the previous inspection have resulted in not enough time or rigour being applied to driving improvement. The acting headteacher is now aware of what needs to be done to improve pupils' achievement. Systems for school self-evaluation have improved and the acting headteacher is beginning to hold teachers to account for the progress made by the pupils. Consequently, teachers are now more aware that they need to focus their teaching on raising the attainment of pupils of all capabilities.

Because the processes for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress are in the early stages of development, governors still do not receive sufficient information to hold the school to account effectively enough.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Establish a clear direction for the school and ensure that the actions taken by school leaders are effective in improving pupils' achievement – inadequate.
- Make sure that governors hold the school to account for the standards it achieves and the rates of pupils' progress by providing them with the information needed to make decisions and judge the impact of the school's work – inadequate.

External support

Following the absence of the previous headteacher, the local authority acted swiftly to provide temporary leadership for the school and, after the inspection, has implemented the statement of action in accordance with the plan. The local authority improvement adviser has been a regular visitor and, together with consultants, has provided the school with helpful support and guidance. However, although some improvements have been made, the work by the local authority has not yet had an impact on raising pupils' achievement.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities for improvement. Now that the leadership is more stable, the school, supported by the local authority, should tackle the areas for improvement with greater rigour and a renewed sense of urgency.