

Special measures: monitoring of The Ellis Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 - 16 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, other staff responsible for safeguarding arrangements, groups of pupils, some parents and carers, the Chair and a member of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority.

Context

The teaching team has changed considerably since the last inspection. One teacher has left and others have returned from maternity or sickness leave. Each class now has a permanent teacher apart from the Year 1 class which, for the duration of a maternity leave, has a temporary teacher. The small Year 4 class is taught discretely in the mornings and mixes with other classes in the afternoons. The existing leadership team has been enhanced by two new senior appointments to take charge of assessment and the curriculum, and the deputy headteacher has taken responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Because the quality of teaching has become more consistent, pupils are beginning to engage with learning better. Those who had a series of temporary teachers in the recent past say they now enjoy lessons more and it is becoming easier for them to learn. This was reflected in the quality of learning observed in lessons, which was never less than satisfactory and sometimes better. The work currently being done by pupils is in line with expectations for their age. Provisional results from national assessments show improvement in attainment in mathematics although there was a slight decline in English. Early indications are that pupils had made better overall progress in Key Stage 2 than last year's cohort. The school is working to sharpen the accuracy of its assessment and has put new systems in place to review how well pupils are doing at regular intervals, so that it can make sure all stay on track.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

Raise pupils' attainment and improve their achievement, particularly in the main subjects of English, mathematics and science - satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are friendly and polite. Some go out of their way to help each other. However, few were seen acting like independent learners who find things out for themselves or tackle problems well as a team. Some do not settle to work with a sense of urgency and clear determination to do their best.

The effectiveness of provision

The deputy headteacher has worked intensively with the support of the local authority to review and improve provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents are very positive about what is offered. Pupils' welfare is given high priority. The staff are working hard, as a team, to make sure that children benefit fully from a suitable range of self-initiated and adult-led activities. Through training and planning together, they are now better placed to support and observe children's learning. They are developing richer opportunities for learning outdoors. New approaches need time to embed before their intended impact on children's language and communication and personal and social development can be seen.

The quality of teaching seen across the school was satisfactory and sometimes good. The over reliance on worksheets seen in the last inspection appears to be a thing of the past, thanks to new, constructive guidance from the school's leaders. A new teaching and learning policy has been agreed. Teachers are making clearer to pupils what they expect them to learn in each lesson and set work at a generally appropriate level for different pupils in their class. Pupils spoken to felt they were learning best through paired or independent activities which helped them (as they put it) 'click' with new concepts. Inspection evidence indicates pupils are making better progress when teachers set them off with a clear sense of purpose on a sequence of well-matched and progressively more challenging activities. In such lessons, the teaching assistants made a significant contribution throughout the lesson, guided independent learning effectively and helped to check everyone's progress. However, the pace of learning was sometimes a little slow, because the purpose and relevance of work was less clear and teachers did not model skills clearly enough. Their questions were not always sharp enough to deepen pupils' understanding, and assessment and feedback were not precise enough about achievement and the next steps to be taken. Teaching assistants were not always directed to have the maximum effect. While elements of good practice were observed in each key stage, it is not yet spread consistently.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

Improve the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage in raising children's achievement by ensuring that there is appropriate leadership and management of the provision - satisfactory

Improve the consistency of teaching so that inadequate teaching is eliminated and the majority of teaching is good or better - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The capacity of leaders and managers to drive improvement is now on a surer footing. Having recognised where there is scope to do better, the governing body and senior leaders, with support from the local authority, have set about an ambitious yet realistic plan for improvement. They have acted successfully to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching. Two recent appointments bring to the senior leadership team the mix of expertise and the extra energy needed to drive change in each of the five areas identified for improvement. Plans are clear but at an early stage of implementation: the school's leaders have worked hard with external partners to lay the foundations for improvement. New systems have been introduced to give more accurate and timely checks that pupils are on track to achieve as well as possible. The new policy for teaching and assessment is being implemented and monitored at a sensible pace. Plans to revitalise the curriculum to boost pupils' engagement and understanding of the wider community and global issues are being discussed. Thus leaders have made a purposeful start on priority areas. Staff have embraced the challenge with a will. They are being held to account against higher expectations. Clear plans to enable them to work together to develop their teaching and assessment skills further are ready to roll out. Governors have a clearer understanding than previously of their statutory duties for equality and community cohesion and of the useful information contained in school performance data. Thus, they are better placed to provide real challenge as well as support. The priority given to pupils' safety and welfare remains evident. Arrangements for safeguarding meet current government requirements. Parents and carers spoken to say they are informed about the school's progress and feel more confident about its work.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance to raise pupils' attainment and achievement - satisfactory
- Promote equality of opportunity and community cohesion more effectively - satisfactory

External support

The local authority has amended its statement of action which is now fit for purpose. It shows more clearly how the school will come to support its own improvement, how other outcomes beyond achievement will be improved and how community cohesion will be promoted. Support from the local authority has been intensive, practical, flexibly matched to priorities and much appreciated by those who have worked with its consultants. The headteacher welcomes the regular contact with local authority officers and the local leader in education, a fellow headteacher. The school's improvement partner and the independent evaluator combine to offer a suitable balance of support and challenge to the school's leaders.