

Nord Anglia Inspections
Anglia House
Carrs Road
Cheadle
Stockport
SK8 2LA

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 491 4191
Direct F 0161 491 4409



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Mrs Janice Craven
Acting Headteacher
Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School
Cateran Way
Cramlington
Northumberland
NE23 6EX

Dear Mrs Craven

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School

Following my visit with Margaret Shepherd, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18-19 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2008. 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.**

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese for Newcastle and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland County Council.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Cramlington Cragside Church of England Controlled Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18-19 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and middle managers, two groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body and the local authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher resigned shortly after the inspection in November 2008. A local headteacher, with experience of working with schools in difficulty has been supporting the school for four days a week since January 2009. She has recently been appointed to the substantive role and will take up the position permanently in April. A local associate headteacher has been supporting the school for one day a week. One member of staff left the school in February 2009. There is currently no permanent leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the inspection, standards were well below average and pupils' progress was judged to be inadequate. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attained standards that were well below average and they made significantly less progress than similar pupils in like schools. Pupils' current work as seen in lessons, books and the school's recently developed tracking and assessment information indicate that standards pupils attain and the progress they make as they move through school are still too low and there are significant gaps between pupils current performance and targets set for them; especially in writing and mathematics. However, more pupils are making better progress than previously particularly in Years 2 and 6. This is because senior managers are beginning to take a range of appropriate steps to improve pupils' attainment and progress and the quality of teaching. At present, it is too early to measure the impact of these actions on standards overall. Teachers' assessment of children's progress in the Foundation Stage is not accurate enough across the different areas of learning to clearly identify the progress children make from their time in Nursery to the time they leave at the end of their Reception year.

Progress on areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2008:

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics and ensure that the curriculum is planned to cater for the needs of all pupils in these subjects – **inadequate**

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have sustained the strengths identified in their personal development since the previous inspection. Pupils are positive about school and continue to have good relationships with each other and their teachers. Relationships in the Foundation Stage are also good but some children lack confidence in making choices and tackling new learning. The great majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They say they appreciate the changes that are being made to the behaviour management systems which celebrate their good behaviour and are helping to tackle the actions of a small minority of pupils who have behavioural difficulties and who occasionally disrupt lessons. Pupils continue to have a good understanding of healthy living and enjoy the range of out-of-school activities available.

The headteacher has taken effective action to improve pupils' attendance and school records for spring term 2009 shows that current attendance is broadly average. Actions include letters to parents, assemblies which focus on the importance of good attendance and a reward system to celebrate those pupils who attend regularly. Improvement this term is in part due to fewer parents taking their children on holiday in these colder months. Holiday absence is more problematic in the mid-summer and early autumn terms. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing but is still higher than that found in similar schools nationally.

Progress on areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2008:

- Improve attendance – **satisfactory**

Quality of provision

Until recently, senior managers did not have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in the school. This has been tackled by the development of a regular programme of lesson observations. They now have a clear base-line in terms of the proportions that are unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or better. Although some teaching is good and the proportion that is unsatisfactory has fallen during the two months of observations, its quality is not consistently good enough to tackle the legacy of significant underachievement in the school. Monitoring clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses of lessons and enables managers to target individual support and guidance to help teachers improve, but it does not identify the impact of teaching on pupils learning. This is hampering pupils' faster progress in some lessons.

The features of good teaching identified in the previous inspection have been sustained and are having a positive impact on the progress pupils make in such lessons. Where the quality of teaching has improved, teaching, and pupils' progress has increased considerably. However, unsatisfactory features are evident in all key stages. These include an inadequate match between pupils' different needs and the

work set and a pace that is too slow to sustain pupils' interest, excitement or concentration across the lesson.

Planning is very inconsistent. There are examples of very carefully planned lessons with interesting and challenging objectives for the learning of different ability groups. In weaker planning, the focus for the key learning is not clear enough and is not related to different groups or individual pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils do not always make the progress they should. A key weakness in the Foundation Stage is the lack of challenge and variety in the independent activities, which are not systematically planned to cover each of the aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

The school is beginning to address its weaknesses in planning the curriculum to cater for needs of all pupils. A new intervention programme is in place for lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Years 2, 5 and 6. There is evidence of improved progress for some pupils but it is too early to evaluate its full impact. Senior managers are aware that this needs to be extended to other year groups. The school does not provide a consistently varied and interesting curriculum to fully meet pupils' needs and interests or stimulate their excitement and challenge them as they move through the school. Although developing well in some classes, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop independent thinking, co-operative, investigative or creative skills.

Foundation Stage staff are approaching the challenges of improving outdoor learning with positive attitudes. There are some interesting activities to stimulate children's learning, such as creating a trail of key words for children to discover, but there is still not enough range in the activities provided. Children do not get enough time to choose to learn outdoors across the school day and adults do not challenge them effectively enough to extend their learning. There is a particular weakness in creative development and opportunities for investigative learning.

The quality of marking is very uneven across the school; this means pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work, resulting in uneven progress across different lessons and subjects. The half-termly tracking information that teachers now collect is helping managers to have clearer view of the progress pupils are making. It is becoming more robust but is not grounded in accurate enough information in all year groups and is not being used well enough in teachers' planning to make sure that work is matched to pupils starting points. For example pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not making the progress they should in lessons because teachers do not make sure that activities and support are matched precisely enough to their meet their individual needs. Their progress is now tracked at an individual level but not according to the three categories of special educational need so the school cannot compare how well these groups of pupils are doing over time or against similar pupils nationally.

Although all pupils are set challenging targets based on their prior learning, and their progress is now monitored through the half-termly tracking information; this information is not used consistently well enough to inform pupils' targets in lessons. Pupils do not often know their targets, or the levels they should be aiming for so they have no real sense of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

Progress on areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2008:

- Provide enough space for children now in Reception to learn effectively outdoors in all areas of the curriculum – **inadequate**
- Improve the accuracy of assessment of learning and ensure that this information is used effectively to set appropriately challenging targets for pupils – **inadequate**

Leadership and management

Since the acting headteacher's arrival in school she has provided a strong lever for change in order to tackle the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher. Staff and governors report that morale has improved and there is a consensus that all need to work together to improve the school. The headteacher has developed the infrastructure and building blocks to move the school forward. Since January, efforts have been clearly focused on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have been strengthened by the greater involvement of middle managers. They are relishing their new roles and beginning to monitor the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils across the school according to their specialisms. They are not yet involved in the wider evaluation of the school's work or the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning. Actions taken, whilst appropriate are too early in their development to have made a significant difference.

The headteacher has prepared a very detailed improvement plan with many actions to tackle the school's weaknesses. It does not include timescales or clear enough targets to enable governors or managers to evaluate the precise difference that these actions will make or to know when they should be completed. However, an additional timeline of day-to-day activity alongside evidence of thorough and regular monitoring of progress towards the actions demonstrates that the headteacher and deputy headteacher have a good and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the progress they are currently making.

Governors are aware that their role of challenging and supporting the school to improve is just beginning. They have not monitored progress against the improvement plan or the LA statement of action. A curriculum and standards committee has been set up with a specific remit to monitor and evaluate impact of actions for improvement but it has yet to meet and does not have specific named members. This means that no one is directly responsible for assuring that it carries out its key function. Despite this, the appointment of the headteacher, together with the good support from the deputy headteacher and the greater involvement of

middle managers in the work of the school means that there is a sharper focus on tackling the areas for improvement more rigorously.

Progress on areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2008:

- Ensure that senior leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the school efficiently and give more direction to the work of middle managers –
inadequate

External support

The local authority is supporting the school satisfactorily. LA officers have prepared a detailed statement of action and action plan and work closely with the headteacher monitoring progress against the success criteria. The action plan links effectively to the school's improvement plan and identifies the support and challenge provided across all areas for improvement. A pivotal action successfully completed shortly following the previous inspection, was securing the appointment of a temporary acting headteacher with experience of supporting schools in challenging circumstances. However, the LA is aware that some of the timescales within the plan have slipped; particularly those related to up-skilling the governing body to carry out their role of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in tackling the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The individual advice and support provided to the headteacher is valued and a range of consultants are working effectively with the school to improve practice and pupils achievement. They are well deployed; for example consultants provide good support in coaching and working with teachers in lessons to improve their skills and competencies.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of independent learning in the Foundation Stage
- Ensure lessons are suitably differentiated to meet the individual needs of pupils and are informed by accurate assessment information.