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Mrs Johnstone  
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Dear Mrs Johnstone

**Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School**

Following my visit with Christopher Griffin, additional inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2009. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke on Trent.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2009.**

Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in Years 1 to 6 by:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by raising teachers' expectations of all groups of pupils, accelerating the pace of lessons and improving organisation so time is used more effectively
- increasing the rigour of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching by focusing it clearly on pupils' learning
- analysing data more effectively to check on pupils' progress, including the progress of different groups, to enable managers to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes.

## **Special measures: monitoring of St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 24-25 November 2010**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, governors, a representative from the local authority and visited 13 lessons.

#### **Context**

Since the previous visit a new headteacher has taken up post together with two assistant headteachers and one classroom teacher. The senior leadership team has been restructured to complement the strengths of the new staff. A classroom teacher is on maternity leave.

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains low but is improving. Test results at the end of Year 6 have improved compared with those of the previous year. In English, 62% of pupils gained Level 4+ compared with 55% in 2009. In mathematics, 65% of pupils gained Level 4+ compared with 51% in 2009. Improvements in the number of pupils gaining Level 4+ are because teachers are now confident in assessing pupils' work and use National Curriculum levels with increasing accuracy. The school now identifies those pupils who are in danger of not reaching their potential at an appropriately early stage and ensures speedy interventions take place that are better tailored to pupils' needs. The school is now better at ensuring those pupils who have reached their age-related targets are challenged further. Lesson observations showed that the majority of pupils now make satisfactory progress. The school recognises that work is not always challenging enough for pupils who are in the early stages of learning English. It has also correctly identified that in most classes writing is weaker than reading and has plans in hand to address this.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 also remains low. The school has correctly identified and addressed a range of issues. Its action is now supporting better progress for all pupils. Careful account of the work in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that the Key Stage 1 curriculum builds upon it well and teaching engages pupils in their learning.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Analysing data more effectively to check on pupils' progress, including the progress of different groups, to enable managers to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes – good.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Pupils' behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Significantly, pupils are now actively engaged and keen to learn in all lessons. The introduction of 'breakfast' at morning break has helped pupils concentrate better in lessons as they are not hungry. Relationships between pupils and staff, and between pupils are good. Pupils are considerate and respectful of each others' views and considerate and polite to visitors. A good range of activities is now provided after school. Pupils enjoy this provision, which enhances the curriculum, and participation rates are increasing. Parents said how pleased they were to be included in school assemblies and how proud they were of their children's contributions to them. The school is continuing to work hard to improve attendance, which is currently in line with the national average. Parents are keen to cooperate with the school to improve attendance further, but a few parents are still taking their child out of school for holidays. The school's data are analysed well to identify patterns of absence clearly and this enables the school, in partnership with other agencies, to target support to families to improve attendance further.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Both the school and the local authority report an increase in the proportion of good lessons observed. Inspectors in joint observations with the leadership team, agreed with their view of the progress made in lessons. The school has an accurate view of teaching and learning. The strongest teaching is in Key Stage 1 and upper Key Stage 2. Where learning is weak, teachers are too focused on tasks instead of what pupils will learn. This limits progression in understanding and the development of pupils' skills and knowledge. In weaker lessons teachers talk too much and do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussion and to explain their thinking. In some of these lessons boys dominate answering questions. In good lessons teachers' questions skilfully probe pupils' understanding and work then builds upon it. In upper Key Stage 2, pupils know their targets and can explain how they are going to meet them. Work is marked well so that comments for improvement match each pupil's individual targets and enable them to improve their work. In good lessons pupils are encouraged to learn independently. They find tasks motivating and learning moves at a brisk pace. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to talk about their work; this helps them to marshal their thoughts and improve their writing. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning English are better supported in upper Key Stage 2. Here, teaching assistants support them in work more frequently and they use well-chosen materials which enable pupils to meet the challenges in the work and improve their understanding of English. Consequently, in these lessons pupils make good progress. However, where support

is less effective, pupils' activities do not sufficiently challenge them, because insufficient regard is taken of their prior understanding. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make better progress in lessons. This is because the work is matched to their particular needs.

Provision in the Early Year Foundation Stage has greatly improved. Children are now tracked more effectively through precise assessment. There are a wide variety of opportunities to assess children in activities that support their understanding of the world and good links are made into the Key Stage 1 curriculum. New beginners to the school are very well supported in Reception classes especially with those who are learning English for the first time.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by raising teachers' expectations of all groups of pupils, accelerating the pace of lessons and improving organisation so time is used more effectively – satisfactory

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The new headteacher has acted with vigour to address weaknesses in the school. She has an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. The members of the newly formed leadership team work together effectively and share the headteacher's passion for learning and improving the school. They have transformed the ethos of the school. Parents commented on how happy their children and the staff are. The school is beginning to develop the capacity to sustain improvements in teaching and learning. Performance management systems are now in place and clear expectations exist of all teachers and particularly their responsibility for learning. Staff identified as potential leaders of areas within the school are responding well to the increased responsibility placed on them. The school has plans to address the inconsistencies in teaching and assessment practice. Consequently, it now has a realistic understanding of how to improve learning opportunities in all years and to improve overall achievement. Some middle managers are beginning to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, but this practice is in its early stages. As a result of these developments, the school has begun to build its capacity for improvement.

The school has successfully improved communications with parents and carers. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the new headteacher and the improvements she has brought about. Relationships between staff and parents are good and parents express an increased confidence in the quality of children's education. They value the opportunities they have to work with the school to help their child's learning. The school has responded positively to a small minority of parents who were unclear about how homework was marked and to parents' request

that homework and units of work be shared with them ahead of the pupils doing them so that they can better help their children at home.

The governors now have an appropriate range of information given to them about the school. They are increasingly confident in questioning the school and holding it to account. Link governors have begun to visit to monitor aspects of the school. Governors are seeking appropriate training to meet their development needs.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increasing the rigour of monitoring and evaluation of teaching by focusing it clearly on pupils' learning – good

### **External support**

The local authority has provided good quality, carefully targeted support to the school. Backup remains, which the headteacher can call upon to ensure that any unforeseen obstacles to improvement are speedily addressed.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Further improve achievement and progress by using the good practice in upper Key Stage 2 to improve the quality of teaching and learning in lower Key Stage 2.