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10 May 2013

Ms Sharon Deackes  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School  
Brampton Road  
Melton Mowbray  
Leicestershire  
LE13 0NA

Dear Ms Deackes

**No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit with Jane Melbourne, Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 8–9 May 2013, 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 a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

**Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, pupils, parents and carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the Leicester Academies Charitable Trust. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes at least once, and made a number of shorter visits to look at the teaching of literacy and group work led by teachers and teaching assistants.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

## **Context**

The academy opened on 1 March 2013 and is part of the Leicester Academies Charitable Trust. One hundred and ninety three pupils are on roll and attend full time. Pupils are organised into one class for each year group from Reception to Year 6. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are no pupils learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils with learning needs supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The range of pupils' needs includes: moderate learning difficulties, behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, and speech, language and communication difficulties. One teacher has left since the school became an academy. The post is being covered by existing members of staff until a permanent replacement takes over in September 2013.

## **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class fluctuates year-by-year but is currently just below that normally expected for their age. The evidence collected by academy leaders, together with that seen in lessons and work books during this inspection, indicates that attainment is rising in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are on track to at least reach the levels expected for their age in most year groups. For an increasing proportion of pupils, attainment is above average. Current Year 6 pupils are progressing well and are on track to reach average standards, but they have not had enough time to fully catch up from previous periods of inadequate teaching and underachievement. For some groups of pupils, including boys and those who have special educational needs, the gap between their attainment and similar pupils nationally remains wider than for others. Leaders now keep a more careful check on how well pupils are doing; they are well aware of where gaps are not closing as swiftly and put extra support in place to address this. Therefore, gaps are closing more quickly and the proportion of pupils on track to reach their more challenging targets has increased.

Evidence confirms that progress has quickened for most pupils. It is good for many and for some it is outstanding. This is because teachers more often challenge pupils to do their best, particularly the most-able pupils. However, progress continues to require improvement for a minority because the quality of teaching has not improved to be consistently good or better. Variations between individuals and groups in different classes remain. The progress of some groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and boys, requires improvement in some year groups. These pupils do well where their progress is carefully monitored and the additional support they receive is very precisely targeted and matched to their

needs. Pupils' progress falters where work is not adapted to match their needs and interests precisely enough and when the class teacher leaves pupils too long with a teaching assistant before checking how well they are progressing.

Funding for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium has been used well to provide additional resources and additional teachers who work with pupils individually and in small groups. The headteacher checks carefully that this support is well-targeted to swiftly close any gaps in learning for these pupils.

The improved teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is helping to close gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding much earlier. This underpins the accelerated progress some pupils make in reading and writing in Key Stage 1. Other pupils still require extra support to get there. The use of practical hands-on resources and opportunities to solve problems in mathematics, using the skills pupils have been previously taught, is paying dividends in some classes. As a result, many pupils are developing confidence to apply their literacy and numeracy skills more successfully when they are working on their own and in a wider range of subjects. Leaders acknowledge that in other classes pupils are not offered enough of these opportunities. The academy's handwriting policy is helping to improve the way that pupils present their work where it is applied consistently, but this is not always the case. The handwriting of some adults provides a poor model for pupils.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching meets the needs of most pupils and ensures that pupils, whatever their background, circumstances and ability, make at least expected progress. For many, it has ensured that their progress has accelerated to good and sometimes outstanding so that gaps in most pupils' learning have quickly closed. During the inspection, no inadequate and some good teaching was seen. However, teaching which requires improvement to be good remains and this is holding back pupils making better progress.

Teachers give clear explanations of what they expect pupils to learn in lessons. They plan conscientiously for the different levels of ability in their class. These plans do not materialise well enough in some lessons, so that pupils of different abilities spend too long doing the same task which is either too easy or too hard. In the best lessons, planning is built upon with probing questions. These questions challenge pupils to think and work hard. They ensure that the teacher is always aware of who is finding the work too hard or too easy, so pupils' misconceptions can be addressed and plans changed on the spot if necessary. Where teaching requires improvement, this is not the case; teachers often talk for too long and pupils do not get enough chances to practise and apply their learning in a range of contexts.

Most teaching assistants are well prepared and add significantly to the learning of the individuals and groups they support in lessons and elsewhere. Sometimes they concentrate too much on getting pupils to complete tasks rather than making sure that pupils are learning as well as they can. Very occasionally, teachers and teaching

assistants are too quick to accept and praise answers which are either superficial or incorrect.

Pupils know their targets well for reading, writing, and mathematics. This is helping them to be more successful in improving their own work. Some good examples of written and spoken feedback were seen, which help pupils to improve their work. However, the agreed marking policy is not consistently applied across school. Teachers' written feedback does not always help pupils with the next steps in learning or teachers do not ensure that pupils address the pointers they have been given, particularly in mathematics.

Teachers plan a range of additional activities, including first-hand experiences, to engage pupils' interest and enjoyment. For example, a girls' mathematics club has been organised because girls are not always as successful as boys in attaining the highest level in mathematics. However, leaders recognise that not enough is done to modify the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all groups of pupils, for example, younger boys.

Good opportunities are provided to ensure the effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in an assembly pupils were given the opportunity to reflect on how they can strengthen friendships. Pupils enjoy learning to play musical instruments and taking part in whole-school dramatic productions. Pupils mostly collaborate well and are respectful of one another in lessons. They develop a good sense of right and wrong. Everyone was seen to be included in all the activities on offer, regardless of their background and circumstances.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour is improving. The vast majority of pupils behave well and behaviour is usually well managed by staff so that the atmosphere is calm and orderly. Pupils say that behaviour is good in the playground and that there are very few incidents of bullying. If these do occur, they say that they are dealt with effectively. The number of recorded incidents of poor behaviour is reducing. The most challenging behaviour, for those pupils requiring significant behavioural support, is managed well so that disruption to others is rare.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are mostly positive. Attendance is above average for the vast majority. However, a very few pupils persistently arrive late and there are a very few families who persist in taking holidays during term time. Pupils' ability to work independently and show tenacity when solving problems for themselves is developing well in some classes, but requires improvement to be good in others.

Pupils say they feel safe at the academy and are taught how to keep themselves safe in different circumstances. They know who to turn to if they have a concern and say that all staff are approachable. Staff understand and fulfil their responsibilities in keeping children safe. They have undertaken the required training

and safe-recruitment procedures are correctly followed. Staff are quick to provide additional support and resources for those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. This ensures that they do not face extra barriers to their learning and that they are prepared well for the move to senior school.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

The academy has maintained the school's original name, ethos, vision and uniform. Most of the academy leaders are moving it forward. Additional funding has allowed academy leaders to develop their capacity to drive improvements, either through funding more time for the senior leadership team to work together on strategic planning or to provide additional staff to teach smaller groups, for example. The senior team carries out a range of activities to check on the effectiveness of the academy's work. The information collected about how well pupils are doing is more comprehensive; this allows leaders to identify more quickly if any gaps between groups are appearing and put additional support in place to make sure that these are addressed.

Improvements plans specify appropriate actions. The checks made for progress against the plans are not as systematic as they should be because not all have clear targets and deadlines. Leaders responsible for raising standards in teaching, literacy and numeracy have an improved understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility. Staff training and support have been well considered and matched to teachers' needs so that aspects of teaching have improved. Each teacher has an individual plan which tells them what they need to do to improve. Despite strengthening systems to hold staff to account for their performance, leaders have not ensured that teaching and pupils' progress are consistently good or better. Not all staff are clear enough about their leadership roles and responsibilities, for example, with regard to leading improvements for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Leadership for subject areas other than English and mathematics have not been finalised. As a result, senior leaders are not fully confident about the quality of teaching and the curriculum, or the reasons for variations in the rate at which some pupils make progress.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. Equality of opportunity is promoted suitably. This is evidenced in the improved achievement of pupils whose progress is most at risk of stalling, such as for those for whom the school receives the pupil premium.

Members of the governing body have undertaken training to make better use of the information that leaders give them to improve the way they check on the success of the academy's work. They are also making more first-hand checks. They are acutely aware of the need to ask even more challenging questions in order to fully hold leaders to account for their work. They are currently short of members and the committee structure is being overhauled and has yet to be fully tested.

## **External support**

Appropriate support has been offered by the academy's education officer. Transition arrangements were carefully made which allowed the academy to get off to a smooth start. The headteacher appreciates the support of the Leicester Academies Charitable Trust, particularly in strengthening leadership and management systems, and the use of information about pupils' performance. Plans are in place to strengthen leadership at all levels. The academy has also benefited from working in partnership with the Affinity Teaching Alliance; this work has helped to improve the quality of teaching.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve the impact of leadership, including governance, by establishing a clear structure, roles and responsibilities and by developing the necessary skills to allow everyone to play their full part.
- Make sure that all improvement plans include starting points, clear measurable targets, deadlines and points to check on their success.
- Raise the achievement of all pupils to be at least good by making sure that teachers consistently:
  - plan activities that match pupils' needs
  - deal with misconceptions swiftly
  - apply the marking and handwriting policies
  - give pupils more opportunities to practise their skills in stimulating and challenging ways.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**