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Elizabeth Holmes
Headteacher
Mereside Church of England Primary School
Mereside
Springfield
Shrewsbury SY2 6LE

Dear Mrs Holmes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mereside Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Andrew Morrish, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25–26 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2012. 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.

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at this time. This condition will be reviewed during the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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, the Director of Lichfield Diocesan Schools’ Commission and the Director of Children’s Services for Shropshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in Key Stage 2, to good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers' subject knowledge of mathematics is improved rapidly through effective training
 - all teachers make use of information about what pupils already know and can do to plan work which challenges them and helps learning to move at a swift pace
 - teachers' marking not only recognises what pupils have done well but also gives them clear information about how to improve their work and challenges them with more difficult tasks.

- Improve pupils' achievement in writing by providing more opportunities for them to practise the skills of writing at length in subjects other than English.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all school leaders are able to recognise and demonstrate best practice in teaching
 - putting in place a rigorous system of checks on leadership and teaching that are followed up with high-quality support for staff
 - improving the quality of action plans for the whole school so that they are more realistic and achievable, and so have greater impact on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching
 - checking carefully on the success of actions taken and the consistency of how plans are acted upon so that what needs to be done next is identified quickly and accurately
 - setting challenging targets for pupils that are shared with their parents and carers
 - ensuring that the governing body uses its knowledge and understanding of the school's work to hold senior leaders to account.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 14 observations of parts of lessons, some of which were undertaken jointly with the headteacher or acting deputy headteacher. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including assessments of pupils' attainment and progress, and records of behaviour or incidents that led to exclusion. Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, three members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. A meeting was held with the school improvement adviser from Shropshire local authority. Both inspectors spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and to pupils at break and lunch times. Her Majesty's Inspector also met with three groups of pupils to hear them read and to look at their progress and targets in reading, writing and mathematics.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2013, the school has appointed a temporary acting deputy headteacher, seconded from another primary school in Shropshire, until a permanent position is filled. Six members of staff will be leaving the school at the end of this term. Three new staff will be joining in September 2013, one of whom will be the recently appointed permanent deputy headteacher. In addition to teaching classes, the other two new teachers will each take up management responsibilities; one will manage English and the other, mathematics.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment is improving steadily and is currently in line with the national average in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Attainment remains broadly average and is improving well by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, and this is mainly due to good teaching in Year 2. Since the last monitoring inspection, there has been a strong focus on improving pupils' literacy skills, particularly in writing. The same is true in mathematics, as teachers are now rightly focusing their efforts on improving pupils' knowledge and understanding of number facts to help them apply these to solving a range of problems. The school's actions are starting to have a positive effect, which is reflected in this year's assessments. Pupils' attainment in Year 6 is very likely to meet the government's floor standard (this is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress). The percentage of pupils reaching or exceeding the expected age-related level (Level 4) by the end of Year 6 in both English and mathematics is well over 60%. This represents a significant improvement compared with previous years. The attainment of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is also improving (in this school, this is additional government funding provided for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals).

Children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains good because leaders and teachers have maintained strong provision in this part of the school. This is also reflected in parents' views, as all that were spoken to paid tribute to the efforts of the early years' team for the welcoming and positive start their children are getting in the Reception classes.

Although there are improvements to pupils' attainment, there remain some significant inconsistencies across classes in the progress made by pupils. These variations in the rate of progress reflect inconsistencies in teachers' expectations and the quality of teaching. In pupils' writing books, for example, many still make repeated spelling errors because teachers and support staff do not always intervene enough during lessons to help pupils improve their understanding of spelling patterns or rules.

The quality of teaching

There has been reasonable progress made compared with the quality of teaching seen at the time of the school's inspection in December 2012. Some teachers have improved their practice but there remains too much teaching that still requires further improvement and a very small amount that is inadequate. Leaders are having an impact on improving teaching as the amount of inadequate teaching is reducing quickly and securely and is likely to be eradicated altogether.

Teachers have responded well to the support and additional training provided by a mathematics adviser to improve their subject knowledge, as well as the support of other local authority or independent consultants and the acting deputy headteacher. Assessments of pupils' learning and progress are now more accurate and accessible to teachers. This has improved teachers' lesson plans but, in some lessons, particularly in mathematics, pupils of higher abilities are not being extended or provided with sufficiently challenging problems to solve. The teaching of mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 2, remains a relative weakness because of this and it explains why too few more-able pupils reach higher levels.

Teachers have improved the way they provide pupils with writing targets to aim for. There have also been some improvements to the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing in subjects other than in English or literacy lessons. The upturn in pupils' attainment in writing is due largely to more focused teaching and sharper leadership that has provided teachers with clear pointers for improvement. The pupils spoken to and selected by HMI to discuss their writing could describe their targets clearly, particularly pupils in Year 2. Leaders and teachers have worked hard to ensure that target setting is established in pupils' workbooks, although there remain variations in how targets are used; pupils are not always clear about the next steps they need to take to help them reach their targets. Writing targets and teachers' marking in English books are more consistent and informative compared with targets and

marking in mathematics books. In mathematics, pupils are not always given clear instructions about any errors made when tackling number problems independently to help them self-correct and learn from their mistakes.

There is some good teaching, mainly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 2. The most effective teaching is characterised by clear instructions aimed at the needs and abilities of all pupils. In these lessons, teaching assistants are much more involved and adapt their time to give attention to pupils across the ability range. This is not yet common practice across the school because more-able pupils often start lessons with work that is too easy or that does not build on what they have already learned. In lessons where the teaching requires improvement, teachers and support staff miss opportunities to adapt the work provided for pupils or to correct any errors while they are working so that pupils can learn from their mistakes. The questions posed or the tasks set in these less effective lessons most often consolidate what pupils already know rather than moving them on to higher levels of understanding. In the small number of lessons observed where the teaching was judged to be inadequate, pupils were unchallenged or marked time because they were either confused about what was expected of them or the work was too easy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around the school is usually good and they are polite and considerate to visitors. Incidents of exclusion have reduced and the school procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and secure in school are of good quality. Attendance is above average and pupils are punctual when arriving at school.

Pupils are now more attentive in lessons and are better able to persevere with tasks for sustained periods of time. This has come about because teachers now provide more time for pupils to work together with a partner or in groups and less time is spent talking to the whole class. In lessons, pupils enjoy sharing ideas with their classmates or listening to other pupils present their work to the class. This was seen to good effect in a Year 6 poetry lesson, as pupils enjoyed listening to one pupil recite his own sonnet. This was rewarded with warm applause and pupils were encouraged to take notes during the recital. In a Reception class, children appreciated the efforts of their classmates when designing their 'spaceships' or writing their own name or messages to each other in the writing area. One particularly outstanding session was observed in the hall, during which a group of Reception children happily played a board game together for a sustained period of time, often helping each other to count numbers and move their playing pieces on the board. The increased level of independence and engagement in many classes is having a positive effect on pupils' personal development.

Although teachers now provide more opportunities for pupils take responsibility for their own learning, sometimes the work provided for pupils is mundane or

undemanding so that pupils become inattentive or their behaviour worsens. Some pupils, understandably, get impatient or fidgety when the teaching does not demand enough of them. In some lessons, pupils sit passively and do not engage enough because they allow others in their group to take the lead, and so they mark time rather than improve their learning. In these lessons, teachers and support staff are not vigilant enough to encourage all pupils to take an active part in group activities or class discussions. Sometimes, teachers and support staff do too much for the pupils, which inhibits their independence and learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Most parents spoken to are happy with the school's progress. Some are rightly concerned that the teaching is not as strong as it should be and are understandably worried about the significant staff changes announced for the start of the next school year. Leaders and governors have made some bold but necessary decisions to build further leadership capacity, with the aim of removing the school from special measures. The most significant changes have been to staffing, leadership responsibilities of subjects, and the necessary reduction in the number of classes to ensure that the school's budget is sustainable given that pupil numbers have reduced.

The appointment of an acting deputy headteacher, seconded from an outstanding primary school in the local authority, has had an immediate impact on improving teaching and the school's monitoring systems. The senior leadership team of headteacher and new deputy headteacher has, in a short time, been effective and laid secure foundations for further improvements. Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2013, the scrutiny of teaching and pupils' progress has intensified and resulted in a number of significant improvements. Assessments and the data gathered about pupils' rates of progress are now more accurate, robust and accessible to staff and governors. This has resulted in improved planning, with sharper learning objectives in lessons. Leaders recognise that more still needs to be done to make sure that, in all lessons, teachers adapt the work they provide for pupils to meet their learning needs and abilities.

Action plans and evaluations following monitoring include clear measures of progress, for example, the percentage of teaching judged as good or better, to help leaders and governors gauge the impact of the school's actions over time on the quality of teaching. The increased level of scrutiny of lessons has also resulted in teachers receiving more detailed feedback about the quality and impact of their teaching. Teachers receive regular information about the strengths and areas for improvement, which are being followed up systematically to ensure continuity of practice and demonstrable evidence of sustained improvement. There is now an increased expectation that only good or better teaching is acceptable. Many teachers and support staff have accepted this and are willing to improve their practice but

also understand that anything that falls short of these high expectations will result in more intensive scrutiny of their performance.

The governing body has also stepped up to its responsibilities more effectively since the last inspection. It has set up a monitoring group that oversees the impact of the school's actions on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. At this stage, this increased level of scrutiny by the governors' monitoring group has not been formalised as a committee so lacks the necessary teeth to add impetus to the actions of other governor committees.

The revised staffing structure has been devised to ensure that the most effective teachers have appropriate management responsibilities and that subjects such as English, mathematics and science are managed by people who have the necessary expertise and strong practice to influence others' performance in these subjects. Leaders are rightly considering extending this to review the management of special educational needs provision; a necessary step as the proportion of pupils at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is above average.

The school's raising attainment and improvement plans now include sharp evaluations of the school's actions that are particularly focused on raising pupils' attainment and improving the teaching in all classes. Recent appointments, including that of a permanent deputy headteacher who joins in September 2013 and who has a strong track record of school improvement as endorsed by the local authority, have strengthened leadership capacity further. The revised leadership structure is refocusing and strengthening the management of important subjects such as English and mathematics. The recent appointments of teachers who have the necessary teaching and subject expertise in English and mathematics is rightly aimed at building on the effective initiatives and good monitoring systems introduced by the highly skilled acting deputy headteacher.

The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage remains strong and this is endorsed by the views of parents. Children continue to make consistently good progress which is reflected in improved outcomes and a rising trend in their attainment in basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics.

External support

The local authority provides good support and a wide range of services involving consultants and subject advisers to work alongside staff and leaders. In addition, the use of Local Leaders in Education, the school's improvement adviser and the secondment of an acting deputy headteacher, have helped to focus on improving the quality of teaching. Governors and staff have benefited from a range of training events, for example, to improve their knowledge of pupil performance data. Regular reviews, advice and guidance as a result of observations of lessons, mentoring and training sessions, are helping teachers to focus their efforts on improving their use

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of assessment and increase their subject expertise, particularly in literacy and mathematics.