

Serco Inspections  
20 Colmore Circus Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T:** 01216 799154  
**Direct email:** aidan.dunne@serco.com

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Elizabeth Holmes  
Headteacher  
Mereside Church of England (Controlled) Primary School  
Mereside  
Springfield, Shrewsbury. SY2 6LE

Dear Mrs Holmes

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Mereside Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 2–3 October 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 third 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.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 2–3 October 2013**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work and visited lessons, including some observations undertaken jointly with the headteacher. He scrutinised documents and action plans, and met with the senior leadership team, four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and the local authority's school improvement adviser. HMI spoke to pupils during lessons and break times, and met with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school and the behaviour and safety of pupils. HMI spoke to some parents at the start of a school day. The school's plans and the impact of its actions were checked along with assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. HMI checked the single central record to ensure that all new staff have been added and that the school complies with statutory requirements in relation to staff vetting and disclosure procedures.

### **Context**

Staffing is more stable compared with the time of the last monitoring inspection in June 2013. Three teachers have joined the school to replace those that left at the end of July 2013, one of whom is the new deputy headteacher.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Although below average, standards are improving steadily and edging closer to the national average by the end of Year 6. The quality of pupils' writing is improving, but too many pupils of average or higher ability make repeated or unnecessary spelling errors. The most able pupils in Key Stage 1 are doing better than previously. This is reflected in improved national assessment results for Year 2 pupils in the summer that showed a significant rise in the proportion of pupils attaining levels that were higher than expected for their age in writing and mathematics. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress and provision in this part of the school remains a relative strength.

These improvements are welcome and the school now has a more stable teaching team to build on these. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement remains mixed, reflecting inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and some shortcomings remain that need to be addressed in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The legacy of some inadequate teaching in the past, particularly in Key Stage 2, left some groups of pupils and individuals behind and with a lot of ground to catch up. For example, pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, which in this school is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, make slower progress than other pupils in the school. Some consistently good teaching and improved assessments are starting to have an impact on narrowing the

achievement gap for pupil premium funded pupils, but some of the teaching still requires improvement so that for these pupils their learning and progress falls behind even more.

Following the good start made in Reception, pupils in Year 1 do not make enough progress developing their knowledge of phonics (letters and sounds). This was reflected in last year's national phonic screening results as only half of Year 1 pupils reached the required standard. Some good teaching in Year 2 helps pupils that fall short of the phonic screening standard to catch up but there remain inconsistencies in the way phonics are taught in Years 1 and 2. The leadership team and local authority subject advisers have identified this and put in place more consistent methods for teaching phonics. It is too early to judge whether these new methods are improving the quality of pupils' reading and writing throughout Key Stage 1.

In Key Stage 2, teachers are now providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and to edit and improve their writing. This is a good improvement since the school's inspection that placed it in special measures. However, pupils of average and higher ability make some unnecessary spelling errors. This has been identified as a priority and the school's action plans show that staff are now making sure that pupils have specific learning targets aimed at improving the accuracy of their writing.

Teachers have started to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. Pupils are now given more varied and challenging problem-solving tasks but the most able pupils should still be doing better. Some pupils in all classes use inefficient methods of calculation when using their knowledge of number facts to solve problems. In some lessons where there is consistently good teaching, the most able pupils are given appropriately challenging tasks, but in other lessons where the teaching requires improvement, this is not the case so pupils do not build on their mathematical understanding, or extend and deepen their knowledge of more complex methods of calculation.

Pupils who have additional learning needs benefit from some well-focused support and intervention. Observations of pupils identified as having special educational needs, their assessments and the scrutiny of some case studies show that these pupils make reasonable progress towards reaching age-related levels in English and mathematics, especially when working with an adult individually or in a group.

### **The quality of teaching**

Most classes are now taught by permanent staff and the recently appointed teachers are effective teachers. This has strengthened the consistency and quality of teaching since the previous monitoring inspection in June 2013. In addition to some good teaching by more established teachers, the school now has the potential to continue improving teaching by sharing more good practice. Leaders have eliminated all

inadequate teaching but there remains some that requires improvement and which is not good enough to help all pupils catch up on lost ground.

Teachers have improved the way they plan and organise lessons. They use assessments better than previously to group pupils by ability. In addition, the newly appointed deputy headteacher has already started to refine assessment information so that it is more accessible to both teachers and governors. As a result of these improvements, the school's leaders are now in a stronger position to check assessments of pupils' progress and performance and are better able to extract information about the progress of particular groups and individuals. This is helping teachers to plan and intervene if pupils need more support or focused work, or to adapt their plans to meet the needs of those who may be falling behind. However, some of the teaching that requires improvement is not challenging all pupils to do as well as they should. In these lessons, teachers and support staff are not checking if pupils understand what they are expected to do. In addition, the work provided for the most able pupils in lessons where the teaching requires improvement, and particularly in mathematics, is not always extending or challenging pupils enough.

The most effective teaching encourages more purposeful learning and is responsive to pupils' needs and abilities. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 6 applied their knowledge of decimal fractions to scrutinise invoices and were encouraged to explore the most efficient ways of grouping grocery items to calculate costs. Similarly, pupils in Year 5 were asked to apply their knowledge of multiples to extend their understanding of more complex number facts. In these lessons, teachers and support staff adapted their plans and circulated more frequently to make sure that all pupils understood what was expected and the tasks were specifically tailored to meet pupils' needs and abilities. In lessons where the teaching requires improvement there is some purposeful learning and progress made by most pupils, but some pupils are confused by the tasks or they have not been asked to think through and choose the most appropriate mathematical methods. For the most able pupils this is frustrating, and leads to some wasted time that does not move their learning on enough. Although teachers are improving their subject knowledge and understanding of programmes of learning in mathematics, some are still unclear about the next steps that pupils need to take. This affects the pace and productivity of learning, especially when questioning pupils during independent or group work, as some teachers and support staff are unsure about how best to move pupils' learning on to higher levels of understanding. This partly explains why some of the most able pupils fall short of the higher levels they are expected to reach by the end of Year 6.

Teachers have improved the way they mark pupils' writing. There is now more useful information provided for pupils to help them check and improve their writing. The most effective teaching also ensures that pupils check the accuracy of their writing, particularly spelling and punctuation. Nevertheless, when pupils write at length for sustained periods they are not always encouraged or shown how to check their spelling errors.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons and at other times are usually good, but in lessons where the teaching requires improvement some pupils go off task. Off-task behaviour includes general chatting about topics unrelated to the work provided, and noise levels that are too high and that disrupt or distract the learning of others. The most effective teachers make sure that pupils understand what is expected, how they should behave and respond to questions, and how to work productively when undertaking tasks independently or in a group. Good teaching sets much higher expectations for both the end product of pupils' work and their attitudes to learning. In some lessons, expectations like these are not being reinforced enough and pupils do not produce enough work because they may have wasted time when working independently.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in attendance rates that are in line with the national average. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy reading, writing and mathematics work, especially when it is interesting and challenging. When asked about pupils' behaviour at break times there was a mixed response from some pupils, but generally, most pupils believe that they are safe and that they trust their teachers to deal with any bullying or hostile behaviour. A scrutiny of case studies and behaviour logs show that incidents of bullying are recorded and followed up immediately. Most of the parents spoken to told the inspector that they are confident in the way staff manage pupils' behaviour.

Pupils told the inspector that they can form friendships easily and that teachers expect them to be polite and courteous to their classmates and to adults. For example, pupils are encouraged to take on personal responsibilities and contribute to their school community as monitors or playground helpers. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular provision, including opportunities for pupils to improve their physical well-being through sport, and their personal development and interests through music, dance and art.

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

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have stepped up the intensity of pupil progress reviews, and are monitoring the performance of pupils and staff with more rigour and purpose. This is building further capacity for sustained improvement and is increasing the amount of good teaching across the school. Action plans are being used well to promote mainly good or better teaching. Having eradicated all inadequate teaching, the staff team and governors are focusing more of their attention on sustaining improvements to the achievement of pupils across the ability range in all classes. These positive developments, along with a more stable staff team provide a secure platform for sustained improvement.

At the time of the last monitoring inspection in June 2013, the school was making reasonable progress given that it was also preparing to lose staff at the end of July and had appointed new staff to begin in September. Since then, senior leaders and governors have ensured that teachers have the right support and guidance that will shift the quality of teaching in the right direction so that more of it is of good or better quality. The headteacher is working closely with local authority subject advisers and with partner schools in the Lichfield Diocese to provide a systematic programme of support, coaching and mentoring for staff. This includes well-devised and ambitious plans for sustained improvement to classroom practice across the school. Nevertheless, there remains some teaching that is not ambitious enough and that leaves some pupils behind. Leaders and governors are rightly aware that there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and that the expectations set by some teachers are not always high enough.

The headteacher provides an accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and helpful feedback to staff after monitoring lessons. The outcome of this monitoring is presented to governors so they can challenge and hold leaders and teachers to account for pupils' progress. The governing body now includes a scrutiny committee which is drawing up clear terms of reference so that it can hold other committees and the school's leaders to account for their performance. This is a significant step in the right direction and has come at the right time given that the deputy headteacher is streamlining assessment information and making half-termly reviews of pupils' progress much sharper than previously. Consequently, governors and leaders are now better placed to gather more precise information about pupils' progress and performance to help them judge whether teachers and support staff are effective enough. The governing body has yet to link the performance of staff to their pay scales and management responsibilities. As new staff settle into their roles and management responsibilities and more established staff exercise theirs, governors must now do more to ensure that teachers with additional management responsibilities are held to account for pupils' performance and that leaders are good teachers in their own right so they can share best practice.

Safeguarding and checks on newly appointed staff have been undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements.

### **External support**

The local authority's school improvement adviser has commissioned a good range of helpful support for teachers and leaders. This support involves training for governors and staff, as well as subject advisers working with teachers who have management responsibilities. The local authority's support has been effective.