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Sally Johnson
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Poynton Road
Shawbury
Shrewsbury
SY4 4JR

Dear Mrs Johnson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Denah Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Andrew Morrish, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14–15 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers 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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese of Lichfield and the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Ensure that teaching is at least good, especially in mathematics and English, by:
 - giving teachers opportunities to observe and learn from good and outstanding teaching
 - making sure that teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the amount of work they should do
 - making sure teachers' feedback and marking help pupils to improve their work and that they are given opportunities to respond to marking more regularly
 - making sure teachers allow pupils to get on more quickly with their work by reducing the amount of time they spend talking to the whole class
 - making sure teachers plan activities that are matched carefully to the needs of individual pupils, and that pupils know what it is they need to do to make progress in their learning
 - making sure teachers ask questions that help pupils to think about what they are learning and that they teach pupils the necessary skills to be able to find things out for themselves.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills and increasing the effectiveness of senior leaders so that they successfully support the headteacher in improving standards
 - making sure that subject leaders provide the necessary training that improves teachers' skills
 - developing the skills of new subject leaders so that they are able to support teachers in improving the rate of pupils' progress
 - ensuring the way the pupil premium funding is spent is checked to assess its impact on the achievement of the pupils for whom it is intended
 - making sure leaders and governors evaluate the success of initiatives to secure improvement and the effectiveness of the school's work by focusing sharply on raising standards.

- Raise standards and increase the rate at which pupils make progress in mathematics by:
 - planning more opportunities for them to develop and use their mathematical skills in a variety of subjects and real-life situations.

Special measures: monitoring of St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14–15 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors and a representative of the local authority.

Context

At the start of this term, the new school building opened and staff and pupils came together on one site for the first time. Several teaching and support staff left at the end of the summer term. The rate of staff absence has continued to be high.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is improving, but the picture is mixed. The school's assessments and tracking information show that by the end of the summer term pupils across the school were generally making faster progress and beginning to close the gaps on where they should be in reading and writing. Better progress was made particularly in mathematics as a result of the support and guidance the teachers have been given in this subject. However, there was still a good deal of variability between classes and the data show clearly a link between better progress and the quality of teaching. Although the progress of pupils in Year 6 speeded up, they did not fully make up for their prior underachievement. The results of national tests and assessments show that just over three quarters of the pupils reached the expected Level 4 in one or more of reading, writing and mathematics, but only just over half reached this level in all three. The proportion of pupils who made the progress that is expected from their starting points in Year 3 was smaller than the national proportion in 2012. The school was disappointed with these results.

The results of teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 were broadly similar to last year's and a little below the local authority's average figures overall, although the proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in mathematics improved. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development was above the local authority's average. This cannot be compared to the previous year's performance as the statutory assessment arrangements have changed.

The leaders' analysis of the assessments has rightly highlighted that there now needs to be an emphasis on improving pupils' attainment and progress in writing. This is being written into improvement plans.

Pupils' progress in lessons observed during this inspection varied markedly. In one mathematics lesson in Key Stage 2, pupils made outstanding progress as they investigated the properties of three-dimensional shapes. As a result of the teacher's skilful questioning, strong subject knowledge and high expectations, all pupils made rapid progress and the more-able pupils successfully devised an algebraic formula to explain the relationship between the different properties of solid shapes. The high expectations of adults in the nursery class, too, together with a well-organised and purposeful environment and good daily routines, support children's learning and development very well.

In contrast, in a few lessons pupils made little progress in deepening or extending their knowledge and understanding. This was largely because the lesson's content did not engage their interest, important ideas were not explained or discussed in sufficient detail and expectations were too low.

There is no particular pattern to the progress made by pupils who are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium; generally these pupils make progress at a similar rate to other pupils in their class because of the impact of the teaching they receive. However, there is no clear link between their progress and how the pupil premium funding has been spent. The number of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority is low, although the school receives pupil premium funding for over a third of its pupils. The challenge for the school's leaders is to demonstrate how pupil premium funding is making a difference to the outcomes for all of the pupils for whom it is intended, including those whose attainment is not a concern.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving, but there is still some way to go before it is typically good. The target that all teaching will be at least securely good in all classes by the end of December looks unlikely to be met. This is because there is still a wide variation in the quality of teaching across the school. The school's checks on teaching and observations during this inspection confirm that some teaching is reliably good or outstanding. They also show that much of the teaching requires improvement, and it is occasionally inadequate.

The teachers have received a good deal of training. They have watched effective practice in other schools and have adopted whole-school approaches to some aspects of teaching, including marking and feedback to pupils and the setting of objectives for learning in lessons. All teachers plan what they and the pupils are going to do in some detail. Lessons are usually pitched at levels that are appropriate for the ages of the pupils, and adaptations are made to tasks according to the range

of ability within the class. Attention is given to how teaching assistants and other adults will be deployed. These are all positive features; however, the impact is much greater in some classes than in others. This is because not all teachers are secure in their understanding of what pupils will learn in lessons, as well as what they will do. Some teachers have clearly understood how to make explicit to pupils what they will be learning and what will show they have been successful, whereas others struggle with this idea.

Where teaching is weaker, challenge and high expectations are lacking. For example, in one lesson pupils showed that they had achieved the lesson's objective during the first 10 minutes. Instead of abandoning the planned tasks and moving on to more demanding work that would deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding, the teacher carried on with the activities. The pupils became bored and learned very little.

Teaching assistants sometimes made a very positive contribution to learning in lessons because teachers had made sure they understood fully the purpose of the activity and what pupils were to learn from it. Sometimes, however, they intervened too quickly to tell pupils an answer or to show them what to do. This hindered pupils' learning.

All teachers have information about the prior attainment and progress of all of their pupils, including separate information about those known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium. They are beginning to use such information when planning specific help and guidance for some of these pupils, but it is too soon to judge the impact.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour continues to be one of the school's strengths. Careful planning for the transition has ensured that the pupils have settled in very well to the new building and have made new friends. A recent survey of their views confirms that almost all like their new school, and for a few the only regret is less space to play. This is being addressed by the school.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour during lessons are better than those seen at the inspection in March. Pupils are generally keen to listen and learn. They collaborate in groups and pairs very well and are becoming skilled at supporting each other and giving positive and encouraging feedback. There are still occasions, however, when pupils lose interest because the work is undemanding or lacking in purpose. It is to their credit that they do not misbehave in such circumstances or disrupt others.

At the harvest festival assembly in the church, the pupils' behaviour was exemplary. Pupils were clearly proud of what they and their classmates had worked together to achieve.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is providing strong and determined leadership and there is no doubting the drive to become a good school. The governing body shares this drive and ambition. The headteacher's view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning is accurate, and she has a realistic perspective of the scale of the tasks that lie ahead.

Although leaders at other levels are equally keen for the school's effectiveness to improve, their work varies in quality and impact. Some leaders are highly skilled practitioners and have a secure understanding of how to lead improvements in their areas of responsibility, but others less so. Some plans for improvement, such as that for mathematics, are sharply focused and based on a thorough understanding of need. Others are well-intentioned, but too general and lacking explicit success criteria against which the leaders can be held to account. The plan for the use of pupil premium funding, for example, is focused mainly on the pupils who may need support to catch up and does not include a strategy for improving the outcomes for those who are eligible for support but may not be underachieving. The plan for improvement for literacy is weak.

The school is moving forward and progress is being made against all of the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in March, but the momentum now needs to accelerate. Much of the drive and urgency comes from a small number of staff. There is a nucleus of effective practice on which to build, but the leadership team as a whole is not yet strong enough to bring about the rapid change that is now needed, because of the weaker practice of some leaders.

The governing body has kept a close eye on the school's progress. Governors are fully involved in monitoring the impact of actions and visit the school regularly, undertaking 'learning walks' that are linked to the areas that have been focused upon in the action plan. Link governors work closely and productively with their counterparts on the school staff.

External support

The school has benefited from good input from both the local authority's advisers and consultants and the national leader in education. They have provided a good balance of support and challenge that has helped improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils in mathematics and supported developments in leadership.