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Helen Morris
St Alban's Church of England Primary School
St Albans Close
Ashmore Park
Wolverhampton
WV11 2PF

Dear Ms Morris

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

Following my visit to your school on 25–26 February 2014, 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 on 6–7 February 2013. 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 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - providing training and modelling of good or better teaching so that teachers have high expectations and are clear about what needs to be improved
 - developing the support programme already in place in partnership with the local teaching school
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information and a range of checks on pupils' progress to plan work that matches pupils' different abilities and challenges them to do better
 - developing teachers' skills in providing both oral and written feedback to pupils so that pupils know how to improve their work and can improve their understanding.

- Raise attainment and progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that checks on pupils' progress are accurate and that teachers and leaders at all levels know exactly how much progress each pupil has made
 - making sure that teachers regularly check that the work set for more-able pupils is hard enough so helping them to achieve the higher levels
 - making sure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are provided with the necessary support and resources
 - improving the way in which activities are planned and presented in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that the rate at which children make progress is accelerated
 - making sure the school gathers information on those pupils who are educated off site so that they know how much progress these pupils are making.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety across the school by:
 - making sure pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe on the internet
 - making sure pupils are fully engaged in their learning and so do not lose concentration and become distracted in lessons.

- Improve leadership and management to at least good by:
 - making sure that all staff are fully trained in child protection and safeguarding procedures, and that all records are completed fully
 - enabling all leaders and managers to monitor the impact of teaching and learning more effectively and make rapid adjustments where necessary
 - implementing effective performance management procedures so that all staff are held to account and provided with opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge
 - making sure that the current good monitoring, challenge and support provided by the governing body is maintained

- providing appropriate resources and more frequent opportunities for pupils to develop a better understanding of the multi-cultural society in which they live.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 25–26 February 2014

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the headteachers of St Alban's and St Thomas's Church of England Primary Schools, Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) from Manor Primary School, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2013, a permanent teacher has been appointed to the Years 1 and 2 class. The teacher in Year 3 has also been appointed on a permanent basis. St Thomas's Church of England Primary School, with which St Alban's is federated, and Manor Primary School, a local teaching school, continue to provide effective support.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Just over half of the pupils entered the Reception class in September 2013 with knowledge and skills typical for their age. Nearly all of the children showed age-related skills in their physical development and making friends but few showed knowledge of number expected for their age. A range of suitable activities are provided in the Nursery class and work is in hand to further improve the day-to-day organisation.

Rates of pupils' progress have improved in most year groups but, given the many gaps in their prior knowledge, pupils are still below the standards expected for their age. For these pupils to achieve age-related standards, progress must accelerate further. While everyone appreciates the urgent necessity for improved standards, success is dependent upon consistent, good-quality teaching.

Despite some improvement in rates of progress, pupils remain behind national expectations in Years 5 and 6. Regular reviews of pupils' progress with individual teachers are not yet established. As a result, problems, challenges and solutions are not identified with sufficient speed. Support for groups of pupils is extensive and increasingly effective, particularly for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals who attract additional government funding (the pupil premium). These pupils, in almost all year groups, make similar progress to their peers. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from the regular support they receive. While they remain below the standards expected for their age, their rates of progress have increased. Year 2 pupils are working at, or close to, age-related expectations. Data tracking of pupils' progress in Year 6 show that they are not yet in line to achieve the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The quality of teaching

The Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) have focused their training on marking pupils' work, providing feedback and assessing pupils' progress. While these aspects have evidently improved in most classes, a few teachers have failed to appreciate that the required improvements in the quality of teaching are not negotiable. Others have been too slow to adopt, or consistently apply, the necessary skills. Pupils' work in upper Key Stage 2 classes is not always marked or, when it is marked, the teachers' comments are insufficiently informative. Written comments are often supportive of pupils' efforts but fail to explain how pupils can improve.

In the lower Key Stage 2 classes, the teachers provide detailed feedback. Their comments show a comprehensive understanding for the journey of progression the pupils need to take; how well they have done; and how they can improve. This meticulous marking ensures that errors are identified, corrected and eradicated in future work. In addition, teachers recognise where pupils have misunderstood concepts and they ensure that time is taken with the pupil to explain so that the pupil's understanding is secure. In one class, for example, the teacher repeatedly reported back to the pupil and made time the following day to revisit the work until the pupil completely understood.

All teachers plan lessons showing an appreciation for pupils' different abilities. Nevertheless, the accuracy of teachers' assessments is variable. Some teachers lack sufficient knowledge of the current National Curriculum to focus their planning on the systematic progression of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Planned learning, informed by on-going assessment, does not consistently ensure pupils' methodical progress through the levels. Staff meetings have been used to share and check assessments so that teachers' precision and confidence in assessment are developed.

On the whole, teachers plan interesting lessons with resources that grab the pupils' attention and activities which inspire genuine interest in learning. In these lessons, pupils are able to explore a variety of solutions to problems and persevere when the work makes them think. Pupils often produce the expected quantity of work and the tasks consolidate the learning objectives. The Year 4 teacher clearly considered the need for pupils to return to and practise basic skills. Time is provided for regular practise of handwriting skills and pupils are expected to apply good standards of handwriting in all of their written work. The pupils comply readily and enthusiastically, and they are eager to receive their 'pen licence'. In this class, all books are marked daily, errors are identified by the teacher and corrected routinely by pupils. The pupils then apply their knowledge of correct spelling and standards of presentation in later work, demonstrating good progress and eradicating historical errors.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in school is generally managed skilfully and sensitively. A small number of pupils have been identified as having behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. These children are fully integrated into classes. Inappropriate behaviour, when it occurs, is dealt with swiftly and sympathetically. Good behaviour is routinely identified and praised. A recent anti-bullying themed week has raised awareness for pupils, and assemblies and displays reinforced the messages, information and pupils' views.

Pupils show good attitudes to learning. In all lessons, the adults and pupils display mutual respect for each other. The social behaviours of taking turns, listening to each other and moving between activities are good. During break times, pupils feel confident to play with each other or hold discussions with friends or the teacher on duty.

Attendance is carefully monitored and persistent absenteeism has been reduced to a very small number of families, where appropriate action has been taken by the head of school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have established clear, unapologetic expectations of all staff. They are relentless in their efforts to address the identified weaknesses. Continued staff turnover has slowed progress from time to time but new staff have quickly settled and taken up the challenge of raising pupils' attainment. Pupils' rates of progress are checked every half term. The findings of such checks are fed back to teachers, other leaders and all governors.

Leaders check pupils' books and observe lessons weekly to reinforce expectations and aspects of training, as well as check that agreed procedures are followed. As a consequence, there is an increased sense of accountability but it is not sufficiently consistent across all staff. Leaders continue to use the full powers available to them through performance management when teachers fail to develop their skills appropriately. SLEs also check the quality of teaching to see how well aspects of their training are implemented. Further one-to-one support is provided when necessary.

Governors are now fully informed of the school's progress. The executive headteacher's reports to governors are detailed, substantiated by measurable evidence and highly evaluative. The governors are left in no doubt as to the barriers to success but also the occasional areas for celebration. As a result of being well informed, governors are able to ask searching questions and seek the necessary clarity. The Chair of the Governing Body reports that the governing bodies from the two schools within the federation are now operating as a single team. Governors are

appropriately aware of the current priorities: pupils' attainment, staffing stabilisation, and improving the quality of teaching.

All staff are trained in child protection and safeguarding procedures, and records are complete.

External support

The local authority representative provides rigorous reviews of the school. The most recent review in February this year included observations of all teachers. The reports following on from reviews are informative and highly evaluative. Training has been provided in the teaching of phonics and for governors.

SLEs from Manor Primary School continue to provide whole-staff and individual training as well as on-going support.