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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 Verna Plummer, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4–5 March 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 fourth 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 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 Director of Lichfield Diocesan Schools' Commission and the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 4–5 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders and staff who have management responsibilities. Inspectors met with three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and with one of the local authority's School Improvement Advisers. Her Majesty's Inspector also met with a headteacher who is working with the school's leaders as part of a collaborative partnership of Church of England primary schools.

The inspectors visited all classes, and some observations of lessons were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons and Her Majesty's Inspector met with two groups of pupils to discuss their reading choices and progress, as well as their writing and mathematics work. He also met four members of the newly formed parent council and spoke to some parents at the end of the second day of the inspection. The school's raising attainment plan and the impact of leaders' actions were checked, along with assessments of pupils' progress. The single central record was checked to ensure that new staff have been added and that the school complies with statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding and staff vetting procedures.

Context

One newly qualified teacher has been appointed on a temporary contract and one part-time teacher is covering for a teacher who is on family leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The improvements to pupils' achievement reported at the time of the school's last monitoring inspection in October 2013 have been sustained. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with the national average by the end of Year 2. In Year 6, the impact of more consistently good teaching is having a positive effect on pupils' progress and performance. Attainment in reading by the end of Year 6 is close to the national average. Although pupils' attainment is below average in writing and mathematics, an increasing proportion of pupils are making much better progress than previously and are catching up on some significant lost ground.

Assessments and data show that an increasing number of pupils who have special educational needs are on course to reach age-related levels in reading and mathematics. Like other pupils though, fewer are reaching age-related levels in writing.

Much-improved teaching and the combined efforts of leaders, governors and staff have turned the school's performance around. Most notably, there are now no

significant gaps between the achievement of those eligible for pupil premium funding and that of other groups (the pupil premium is additional funding, which, in this school, supports pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority). This too is a significant improvement since the school's last monitoring inspection in October 2013.

The teaching and provision made for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage remain strengths of the school. The children make good progress and an increasing proportion of them are already working at or beyond the levels expected for their age. The transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 1 has improved and is more consistent. There is now more effective teaching of phonics, which is having an immediate effect on pupils' achievement in reading and writing. For example, pupils in Year 1 are on track to reach much higher standards in the phonic screening check this summer than last year (this is a national test to check pupils' knowledge of letter sounds and spelling). Work and assessments show that pupils in Year 2 are doing better than previously because the quality of teaching they experience now is more consistently good. This is resulting in improved outcomes and faster progress, with a significant increase in the proportion of pupils expected to exceed the levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.

In Years 3 to 6, standards are also rising, although there are pupils in each year group that are having to catch up on a lot of lost ground as a result of teaching that was previously insecure and inconsistent in quality. It is pleasing to report during this monitoring inspection that the large majority of pupils in every Key Stage 2 class are making faster progress now than at any time in recent years. As a result, pupils' level of attainment is rising well and is recovering from a previously very low base. More pupils in every class are on course to reach or exceed age-related levels in reading and mathematics than last year. In writing, attainment remains patchy as some pupils make repeated spelling errors and the form and structure of their handwriting vary considerably. Pupils' work is usually well presented and neat, showing that they take greater pride in their work and that teachers have higher expectations. Pupils are getting more opportunities to write more complex sentences and workbooks show more extended pieces of writing, with more pupils than previously able to punctuate and set out their work in paragraphs.

The quality of teaching

It is reassuring for parents and carers to report that most of the teaching is of good quality and there is no inadequate teaching. Although some teaching still requires improvement, staff changes since last September 2013 and newly appointed teachers have strengthened the quality of teaching. As a result, standards are improving and the large majority of pupils are making more progress now than at any time previously in recent years.

The systems used to manage assessments and information about pupils' progress and performance are now embedded and accessible to both staff and governors. In addition, teachers have an accurate understanding of every pupil's level of attainment and they use their assessments to provide more ambitious learning targets for pupils to aim for. As a result, teachers are now more skilled at accurately grouping pupils by ability.

The most effective teaching builds on what pupils have learned before, and the tasks set for pupils are adapted so that they are challenged to reach higher levels of knowledge and understanding. In lessons where the teaching requires improvement, the tasks set for the most able are not always challenging enough; for example, when pupils are required to undertake more mundane tasks before moving on to work that is at the right level of challenge.

In mathematics, good teaching and effective classroom support in most lessons take pupils through each stage when working through more complex problems like the addition of fractions or complex number sequences. Nevertheless, in some lessons where the teaching requires improvement or during which pupils' learning slows, teachers and support staff do not give pupils enough time to work through a task so they can experiment and share ideas with their classmates in order to work out the logic or sequence of steps needed to solve a problem.

Pupils' writing books show that they now have more opportunities to write at length independently, and time to correct and edit their work. When pupils write extended pieces of work, the most effective teaching ensures that errors are addressed while pupils write. This is not always the case though, as some pupils' workbooks show that they do not make enough progress over time in improving the accuracy of their writing, particularly spelling and punctuation.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils talk with more confidence about their work and reading choices. Some pupils told an inspector how much they enjoy their lessons now compared with previous experiences because, as one explained, 'We can already see a difference this year.' Pupils have also noticed that teachers set higher expectations for behaviour and work. 'There are better systems now and everyone is much better behaved,' as one explained and another pupil added, 'Yes, everyone behaves well most of the time now and there is less messing about in lessons.' Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) asked different groups and individuals about their school and found that pupils are more upbeat and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Pupils spoke to HMI with pride as they explained how they are encouraged to take on different responsibilities as house captains, play leaders, school council members or tuck shop managers. These enable pupils to improve their personal and social development as

they take on collective responsibilities in their school community. The school continues to help pupils improve their physical skills, health and well-being through a very good range of extra-curricular sports and activities.

Pupils feel safe and secure. They form friendships easily. They are polite and courteous to their classmates and adults, and there are effective procedures in place to resolve any minor 'fallings out' or arguments at lunchtimes.

Attendance continues to be good, as it is currently above the national average and pupils are punctual. Temporary exclusion rates are at an all-time low since the school was placed in special measures in 2012, reflecting leaders' much-improved behaviour management systems and teachers' higher expectations.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has now secured a platform for more sustained improvement to teaching. She is ambitious and determined to continue improving the quality of teaching and raise pupils' attainment in all classes. Together with the governing body, the headteacher has managed to secure the permanent appointment of good-quality teachers, including that of a very effective deputy headteacher. This has enabled leaders and staff to build sufficient capacity for sustained improvement to pupils' progress and teachers' performance. Leaders and governors have increased the pace of improvement in their determination to eliminate weak teaching. There are challenging targets in the school's raising attainment plan for teachers and support staff to aim for.

The most effective teachers now have management responsibilities and are best placed to oversee and support improvements to the teaching of English and mathematics, and to the management of support for pupils who have special educational needs. This has resulted in more consistent classroom practice, higher expectations and coherent lines of responsibility and accountability that are underpinned by robust and more regular reviews of pupils' progress at the grass roots, that is, at classroom level and for each individual pupil.

Improved assessment systems and a broader range of methods of checking pupils' and teachers' performance, such as book reviews, learning walks and drop-in visits to lessons, mean that teachers are more accountable and are much clearer about what outcomes to expect from pupils to sustain good rates of progress. Leaders, governors and staff rightly recognise that there is still more that needs to be done to ensure that more pupils reach or exceed the levels expected for their age.

The governing body is much more involved in monitoring and, through its scrutiny committee, takes on greater responsibility for gathering first-hand evidence in order to hold the school's leaders more fully to account. Governors and the senior leadership team have taken effective steps since the last two monitoring inspections

to undertake more robust scrutiny of pupils' progress and teachers' performance. Leaders measure the impact of the school's actions using the targets set out in the raising attainment plan. They are very good at using this plan as a route map to gauge how much progress is being made and to determine what more is needed to address the most urgent priorities, such as ensuring that more pupils in all classes reach or exceed age-related levels.

Parents have also noticed improvements. Many have commented on how pleased they are that pupils are receiving more consistent teaching without the overuse of supply staff. Parents now have an increased voice through the recently appointed parent council. The council hopes to expand and hold further meetings that allow opportunities for parents to understand the school's work and to have more influence. Both governors and staff are determined to allow both pupils and parents to play a greater part in the school's future success as it moves towards the removal from the category of special measures. The headteacher, staff and governors have, at last, galvanised the school community, as it is growing in confidence and is determined that the school becomes a good school in the near future.

External support

The local authority has provided the right balance of support and challenge. It continues to undertake accurate reviews of the school's progress. These reviews and subsequent development points for teachers provide the school's leaders with a focus for sustained improvement to teaching. The support provided by the collaborative group of partner headteachers has the potential to provide more opportunities for teachers and support staff to see and share good practice with other schools.