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Mark Davies
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Davies

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

Following my visit to your school on 30 April–1 May 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 20 March 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 Director of Children's Services for Shropshire and the Diocese of Lichfield.

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.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 30 April-1 May 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and eight other governors, the National Leader of Education who is working with the school and a representative of the local authority.

Context

There have been significant changes to staffing since the last monitoring inspection. The headteacher has been absent for six months on compassionate leave because of the serious illness of a close member of her family. The deputy headteacher and a class teacher have left the school. The school's administrator is on long-term sick leave.

An acting headteacher, who is the experienced headteacher of another Shropshire school, has led St Mary's since November 2013. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed from within the school. Several posts are filled on a supply or short-term basis.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is continuing to improve. The proportion of pupils working at the levels expected for their age is growing, because pupils are making better and more consistent progress in lessons. In Year 6, around three quarters of the pupils are predicted to reach the expected Level 4 in national tests and assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who have made or exceeded the progress expected of them across Key Stage 2 is much greater than last year in writing and mathematics, but progress in reading, although better, is not so strong. Many of the pupils had a good deal of catching up to do, as a result of weak teaching in previous years.

In Year 2, the teacher's assessments of pupils' attainment show that the proportion reaching the expected Level 2 is greater than last year, and the proportion reaching higher levels has improved in reading, writing and mathematics.

Some of the assessments of pupils' attainment and progress made at the end of the last academic year were overly optimistic and therefore unreliable. A good deal of work has been done to make sure that current assessments are accurate. Teachers have worked with consultants from the local authority, staff from other schools and colleagues within school to discuss and agree judgements. The achievement of different groups of pupils is carefully tracked to make sure that none are falling

behind. There are no substantial differences in the achievement of pupils supported by pupil premium funding and other pupils.

In lessons, pupils worked with interest in groups or on their own. They were keen to talk about what they were learning. Pupils' progress in lessons is often good, but not always so. This is because the work is sometimes insufficiently challenging or stimulating. While this consolidates what pupils already know and can do, it does not take pupils' learning forward quickly and help them narrow the gap on where they should be. Pupils' books show that the writing tasks they are asked to do are often focused on the mechanics of writing. The balance between creativity and enjoyment and making sure that pupils use the features of text appropriate for their age is not always well struck.

The quality of teaching

The school's monitoring activities and observations made during this inspection confirm that teaching continues to improve; however, it is not always good and the target for good teaching has been missed. Nevertheless, there is greater consistency of approach and expectations across the school and teachers' confidence is growing.

Staff have continued to receive a good deal of support and training. This has included coaching and development activities led by staff within St Mary's, as well as external support. The capacity to improve teaching from within is developing well.

During this inspection, three class groups went out on educational visits. Pupils were eager to talk about their experiences afterwards and this showed that the visits had captured their imaginations and enthusiasm. Older pupils thoroughly enjoyed dressing as Roman soldiers and learning about life in Roman Britain. Younger pupils were delighted to learn about food production and spoke with fascination about how a fish was prepared. Back in class, however, this keen interest was not fully seized upon and some of the follow-up activities were uninspiring.

Improvements in assessment arrangements and the tracking of pupils' progress have increased teachers' understanding of their responsibility to make sure that all pupils do as well as they should. Discussions between leaders and teachers about individuals and groups of pupils take place regularly and are included in the process of managing teachers' performance.

Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and they give pupils feedback on how well they have done and what they need to do to close the gap on what is expected of them. Pupils are given time at the start of the day to respond to suggestions and make corrections.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During this inspection, pupils generally behaved well in lessons and around the school. They were responsive to their teacher and other adults, and listened with respect to their classmates. Staff reported that the few pupils whose behaviour can be more challenging are responding well to the firm and fair approach of the acting headteacher. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour occur less frequently than before.

Pupils' behaviour in the playground has in the past been boisterous and not as good as in class or assembly. This has been a focus recently; pupils now have equipment to use during break times, and, after a long wait for reasonable weather, climbing equipment is being installed. The quality of supervision by adults at break times is not always good enough. During this inspection, adults supervising in the playground at one break time did not engage with pupils at all but stood together talking.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The efforts of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, with the support of the governing body and members of staff, have made sure that the school's effectiveness has continued to improve. The difficulties arising from the headteacher's absence have been managed very well. The acting headteacher has successfully worked on issues remaining from the amalgamation of the two schools and the move to one site. He has brought the staff together as a group, has built better relationships with parents and has ensured consistency of expectations for pupils and for staff. During this inspection, several members of staff said how much they appreciated this. Important activities, such as the performance management of teachers, have continued without interruption and the process has been strengthened by closer reference to the national *Teachers' Standards*.

The position regarding leadership in the longer term is uncertain. Key leadership posts are filled on a temporary basis. At present, this is not causing difficulties, but it has implications for the school's capacity to sustain improvement over time as further changes are inevitable. The governing body, with the support of the local authority, should give careful consideration to ways of building and strengthening leadership at all levels, so that the impact of changes that may occur in future can be minimised.

A wide range of monitoring activities has been carried out. Supported by the National Leader in Education and local authority representatives, subject leaders have been helped to build their skills in observing and evaluating teaching and learning. Subject leaders are increasingly driving improvement in their areas of responsibility. They have a greater understanding of performance across the school in their subjects, and so have been able to tailor their action plans more specifically to meet needs. However, as in the past, some of the individual action plans lack measurable targets and are too vague. Monitoring activities and suggested lines of

enquiry for governors are sometimes checks that things have happened rather than the evaluation of what the impact has been.

As the school moves closer to the removal of special measures, planning for the future needs to become strategic and more closely focused on the most important things that need to be done, rather than trying to improve on a broad front. The acting headteacher, staff and governors have the ambition for St Mary's to be a good school as quickly as possible. This vision now needs to be set out in a single, succinct plan that sets out the route to the removal of special measures and beyond.

The governing body has continued to provide the school's leaders with support, guidance and challenge as well as stability in difficult times. Link governors work well with members of staff. The governor with responsibility for the pupil premium has carried out a thorough review of the spending and its impact. Governors have recently been involved in making difficult decisions as a result of the impact of a falling roll on the school's budget. This process has been managed well by governors and the acting headteacher.

External support

The local authority's advisers and consultants have continued to provide good support. This has helped to keep the school on track and to make sure that momentum has not been lost. The local authority's staff are mindful of the need to step back and allow staff the chance to show that they can lead improvements themselves. As a result, support for mathematics has reduced and the responsibility for further improvement rests with the subject's leaders.

Support from the National Leader in Education has been secured for another year. He has worked well with the acting headteacher and has had a good impact on improvements to the quality of teaching.