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Mrs Natalie Tomlinson
Headteacher
St Chad's CE Primary School
Gladstone Street
Winsford
Cheshire
CW7 4AT

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Chad's CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 2014, accompanied by Eileen Mulgrew, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and senior staff, inclusion manager, family support worker, Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Leadership and Management committee and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

An assistant headteacher has been appointed to complete the senior management team. A teacher in the Reception Year has left and a replacement teacher has taken up the post. A further two teaching assistants have been appointed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

All of the parties providing leadership and management for the school, the senior staff, key governors, the local authority and the diocese, have worked together effectively to make an impressive start to creating the conditions for the removal of special measures.

With the arrival of the assistant headteacher, the senior leadership team is complete. The new headteacher, along with her deputy headteacher, has brought stability, established high expectations of staff and a sense of accountability for pupils' progress and introduced clear leadership procedures to monitor and assess the work of the school. Leaders are successfully building staff morale, which had been considerably shaken by the circumstances that led to the school being placed in special measures. The school's welcome, ethos and appearance are said to be much improved over what they were. All those spoken with felt the staff now acted as a cohesive team that shares the leadership's determination to improve. Each aspect of the issues concerning teaching and leadership and management identified by the January inspection receives close attention in the school's plans for improvement. An early start on action was made, even before the publication of the inspection report. Already, much has been achieved. For example, rigorous procedures have been implemented to track the progress of pupils against challenging targets. Also, in the latest local authority review of teaching quality, two thirds of teaching was judged good or better and none inadequate. This picture of teaching quality is far more positive than that observed by inspectors in January. A secure baseline for pupils' standards has been established and early indications are of most pupils making the necessary accelerated progress. However, many pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding from the past, especially the older pupils. Much effort has gone into identifying those pupils and groups of pupils who have fallen behind, or who have disabilities or special educational needs. Intervention strategies to support their learning are being put in place, parents are kept informed and relevant external agencies with a particular contribution to make, such as those for speech and language development, are welcomed into school. Beyond the issues identified by the inspection team, the headteacher demonstrates a clear, longer-term vision for the school in her identification of other aspects that she wishes to develop, notably, much closer work with St Chad's pre-school to ensure the best possible start to Reception, a school that is more responsive to its pupils and parents, a more exciting curriculum and a stronger sense of St Chad's Christian foundation.

The governing body is in a stronger position to support and challenge the senior staff than it was at the time of the recent inspection. It is better organised, better placed to check that statutory duties are met and is beginning to review school policies and take ownership for them. Key governors acted decisively in October 2013 to advertise for and secure a permanent headteacher for the school, a decision which has proved instrumental to the positive start the school has made to date. The

governing body has experienced a similar degree of change as have the staff of the school. Many governors are new to governance. There is much to learn and temporarily, most of the burden of governance is borne by a few key governors. However, the process of auditing the skills required by the governing body against the skills governors possess has begun, supported by a National Leader in Governance. The local authority is providing training. The challenge for governors is to build a governing body that fully represents the community and which also has the range of skills necessary to meet the demands of modern governance.

The local authority is providing purposeful and effective support and challenge for the school. This began over a year ago when it became clear that the school was not improving sufficiently following its 2012 inspection, when it was judged as 'requires improvement'. Decisive action, including the issue of a warning notice and the appointment of three additional governors, can be seen, in hindsight, to have proved seminal in exposing the leadership to proper scrutiny. It has supported the school in providing temporary leadership and staffing throughout the following painful period of readjustment, including the deployment of its human resources departmental expertise. Now, under stable leadership, it continues to provide intensive support through the school improvement adviser and a range of consultants to meet the school's needs in literacy, numeracy and inclusion. Where necessary, it has brokered support for governance, as above, and school leadership in arrangements with a Local Leader in Education. Its procedures for independently assessing and monitoring what is happening in classrooms are robust and school leaders are required to account for improvement in regular, frequent meetings chaired by senior officers of the local authority. It recognises the importance in developing strong governance that reflects the community and is closely involved in the training of new governors.

The contribution of diocesan officers is now actively encouraged. They are involved in the improvement plans for the school. The new leadership and governance are more welcoming of the church at local and diocesan levels and the intention is to strengthen the school's Church of England roots.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector