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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 17–18 September 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 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 appoint a newly qualified teacher to the Year 5/6 class.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 17–18 September 2014

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector 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, managers with responsibility for English, mathematics and special educational needs, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in February 2014, two members of staff have resigned. Leaders restructured the classes to take account of the small number of pupils in some year groups. One temporary teacher was appointed to the Reception class from September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

More than half of the children in the Reception class achieved a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2014. The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, the sounds that letters represent, was below the national average in 2013 and fell further in 2014.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 improved in all subjects in 2014 but remained below the 2013 national average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The proportions of Year 6 pupils who made or exceeded expected rates of progress improved in reading and mathematics in 2014. Pupils failed to make the same rates of progress in writing. Leaders monitor closely the rates of progress made by individual pupils in each year group. These records trigger planned support where needed. Governors receive regular analysis and accounts for different outcomes.

Pupils have reading books suitable for their age and ability. Too many pupils entering Year 2 and above have not mastered the basic reading skills of blending sounds or breaking down unknown words into smaller parts. Confident and competent pupils read books of their own choice most of the time. Pupils are not encouraged to borrow books from the school or local libraries. As a consequence, few pupils expressed a sense of reading for enjoyment, interest or to gain information.

The executive headteacher keeps close contact with the alternative provision arranged for two pupils. The headteacher's regular visits enable her to keep track of the pupils' work, their rates of progress and achievements and provide the alternative provision with evaluative written feedback. Any concerns, including those of a safeguarding nature, are shared and future approaches agreed. The provider sends specific, detailed information regarding each pupil's individual special educational needs to inform a wider discussion with the local authority's educational psychologist to ensure relevant support. Achievement and attendance reports are sent to St Alban's every term. All data is included in St Alban's records and reported to governors. This regular exchange of information ensures that St Alban's retains the responsibility for the provision and outcomes of these pupils even when educated on another site.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection but small pockets of weaker practice remain. Teachers have much higher expectations of pupils and lessons are appropriately focused on what the pupils will learn. The quality of teaching is checked routinely by leaders and evaluations are made against the published *Teachers' Standards*.

Children and pupils of all ages made significant progress in lessons where teachers skilfully built on entry assessments and prior learning. In a Reception phonics lesson, some children from the Nursery class joined the Reception lesson. In addition, a small group of children was taught separately by a teaching assistant. All of the children knew the routines and maintained good levels of concentration. The adults modelled the letters and sounds clearly so that the children copied accurately. The adults kept a close watch over the children's attempts and sensitively provided additional help so that all of the children succeeded. The children were genuinely excited to be introduced to a new letter and eagerly offered what information they had. All of the adults reinforced their expectations of children's behaviour through regular praise and sensitive reminders. As a consequence, children raised their hands before speaking, took turns and listened carefully to each other. The adults focused all of their efforts on making sure the children learned something new and, therefore, secured small steps of progress.

All teachers planned lessons which focused clearly on the intended learning and prepared tasks which helped to consolidate pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers are suitably aware of the additional demands placed upon them in meeting the needs of pupils who have special educational needs but they are less attuned to the needs of the most able within the group of more-able pupils. Teachers explained new concepts clearly, captured pupils' interest and developed pupils' thinking with careful questioning. Pupils offered well-expressed responses, and eagerly demonstrated newly acquired knowledge or skills. Their sentences frequently

included subject-specific vocabulary to confirm their understanding. Teachers' enthusiasm was often infectious and inspired pupils' effort.

Pupils' early examples of written work in books show that while the quality of teaching and learning has improved overall, a small proportion of marking requires improvement. Common punctuation errors, for example, the names of days and months were not always corrected. Where teachers wrote pertinent and succinct comments in their marking of pupils' work, pupils had a sound understanding of what they had done well and what could be improved. Most teachers provided additional time for pupils to correct their work or practise skills further. These exercises helped the pupils to eradicate errors and overcome misunderstanding. Last term pupils had to earn the right to use a pen by writing neatly over a period of time. A few pupils are now using pens but without having gained the skills to do so. In these cases presentation remained poor.

Where learning was particularly successful, teachers quickly established excellent behaviours for learning. In a Year 5/6 lesson, pupils sustained their concentration and they were eager to try hard and improve. The teacher knew the pupils well and expected high standards from all of them. Even the table arrangements enabled all pupils to see the interactive whiteboard, assisted discussion where necessary but encouraged pupils to focus their attention on their work without unnecessary distraction.

Teachers formally and regularly assess pupils' achievements. Formal assessments are made every half term and are recorded and checked by leaders. Leaders and governors monitor pupils' rates of progress and strategies to give specific help are considered where pupils fall behind. These methods of support have resulted in pupils' accelerated progress, including those supported by the pupil premium. However, not all support requires sustained additional help. The school has not yet experimented with identifying specific small gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills, providing precise support and reviewing after a short timescale – for example, a single session or support over one or two weeks only.

Current assessments of pupils' progress against the previous National Curriculum levels are accurate and withstand scrutiny and checks. Leaders are working closely with a local teaching school to consider future assessment systems for the new curriculum.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are aware of the behaviour expected of them. The rules for behaviour are displayed around the school and reinforced sensitively by all adults. Pupils are generally polite and courteous. Records of inappropriate behaviour or bullying provide accounts for each incident and the action taken. However, there are no

routine reviews of behaviour over time, as recorded in the log, to identify patterns so that future improvements can be planned.

Pupils' punctuality has improved. Parents and pupils are aware of the procedures for late arrival and incidents are more often related to problems with public transport than indifference. Nevertheless, punctuality is monitored closely and letters are sent home at different stages of concern and the education welfare officer is informed where problems persist.

Attendance remains below the national figures but it is closely monitored and regular absence is pursued speedily. The full range of available sanctions is adopted by the head of school if incidents of poor attendance do not improve.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher is determined to provide the pupils at St Alban's with a good standard of education. She has developed a team of leaders who are united in their vision and ambition for the school. The pace of improvement has been further developed by a review of the school improvement plan. The plan has been rewritten to take account of the necessary developments beyond the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection in February 2013.

Improving and sustaining the quality of teaching is a high priority for all leaders. The executive headteacher together with the heads of school keep track of pupils' progress. Regular analysis of such records helps leaders to raise questions about the quality of teaching and investigate as needed. Leaders are absolutely clear about the links between the rates of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and teachers are challenged as appropriate. In reaching their decisions, leaders observe lessons and check the quality of work in pupils' books. Feedback is provided for individual teachers; development points are made within targeted timescales; and checks are conducted. Teachers are given specific targets regarding pupils' progress as part of their performance management.

Leaders have rightly identified the need to develop managers within the school so that leadership responsibilities can be appropriately distributed. There are now managers for English, mathematics and special educational needs. The manager for English was given the responsibility this month and has quickly identified priorities and established an action plan which outlines timescales, training needs and expectations. In addition, she is able to share a range of strategies to help improve specific aspects of English. The manager for mathematics was appointed in September 2013 and agrees that an action plan would be a sensible next step to drive improvements forward, but this has not yet begun. The coordinator for special educational needs was appointed in February this year. She already has the National Award in Special Educational Needs Coordination as recommended by the Department for Education Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of

Practice. The coordinator provides the day-to-day support for teachers in identifying concerns and writing plans for individual pupils. The head of school and the coordinator have established contact with outside specialists and involve parents and pupils as appropriate in the level of support provided. The coordinator has a clear understanding for the recent Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and the necessary development of the services within the local offer. These managers do not have job descriptions and, therefore, their responsibilities and accountabilities remain unclear.

Leaders have taken a scrupulous approach to safeguarding. Training to update all staff is planned for later this month. Policies and procedures have been updated to reflect the recent statutory requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education. Appropriate first aid accreditations have been gained.

The Chair of the Governing Body has demonstrated a keen resolve and determination in driving the governors' contribution to school improvement. Under his leadership, governors are not complacent; they challenge the school to perform better but they are also determined to continue their own journey of improvement. As the Chair of the Governing Body explained, the governors need 'to go beyond support and questioning to challenge and driving'. Poor attenders have been removed from the governing body and a review of committee structures is well underway to make better use of the available expertise. The governing body has helped to establish a united federation between the two schools. Although governors continue to provide leaders with substantial support, they are rigorous in their challenge and ambition for bringing about improvement. Individual governors visit the school more regularly but do so to monitor the standard of pupils' work, observe and evaluate pupil' behaviour and report back to the finance and general purposes committee and monitoring group. The committee meets every three weeks and is kept closely up to date about pupils' progress and attainment as well as the quality of teachers and individual teachers' competency.

External support

A local teaching school continues to provide support, for example, through staff meetings to extend teachers' methods in lessons. In the past, such training was targeted at individual staff members but as improvements have been taken on board the training is now able to extend to all staff.

The school improvement officer has forged speedy links with the school following his recent appointment. He has conducted a full review of pupils' achievement and evaluated the quality of teaching. Each review is followed up with a detailed evaluation of findings. The school improvement officer has rightly identified the need to develop middle managers so that leaders can better distribute responsibilities.

