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Mrs Rachael Coulthard  
St Mark's CofE Primary School  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mrs Coulthard

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 21–22 June 2016, 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 that 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 that took place in March 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2015.**

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good, and in so doing improve the progress of all groups of pupils across the school by:
  - ensuring that teachers and teaching assistants have the highest possible expectations of the progress pupils are capable of making and of their behaviour
  - making sure that tasks and activities in lessons match the skills and abilities of all pupils so that they are less likely to become frustrated
  - ensuring that marking is precise and identifies how pupils can improve their learning
  - making sure that pupils' writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling skills are developed consistently across all subjects
  - ensuring that pupils are provided with as many opportunities as possible to practise their reading skills
  - checking frequently in mathematics lessons that pupils can apply their mathematical understanding to problem-solving activities.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
  - making sure that governors use their skills to challenge school leaders effectively, and hold senior leaders to account for raising standards
  - ensuring that senior leaders provide regular training for staff
  - putting into place clear plans for improving the quality of teaching
  - monitoring the curriculum in order to ensure that it is fully effective
  - holding teachers fully to account for the performance of pupils
  - ensuring that data on pupils' performance are accurate and used effectively by all staff to monitor the performance of pupils closely
  - improving provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs through enhancing leadership, the quality of teaching and arrangements for supporting these pupils
  - ensuring that middle leaders, including those responsible for English and mathematics, have a fuller role in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
  - making learning more interesting so pupils are more enthused in lessons
  - communicating clear expectations to pupils about how they should behave in class
  - fostering better relationships with parents in order to improve pupils' attendance further
  - making sure that any bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively and to parents' satisfaction

- making certain that any racist incidents are properly recorded.
- Improve children's achievement in the early years so that they are better equipped with the skills necessary for their learning in Year 1 by:
  - making sure that teaching is always at least good
  - ensuring that the leader monitors the performance of children accurately, assesses how they are developing, and uses the resulting information effectively to plan the next steps in their learning
  - ensuring that the leader provides regular training for staff.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 21 June 2016 to 22 June 2016**

### **Evidence**

I observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documents. I met with the executive headteacher, head of school, subject and other leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I spoke to one group of pupils and held a number of informal conversations with other pupils across the school. I also observed teaching and learning in every class and I conducted a joint book scrutiny with senior leaders.

### **Context**

The school is now subject to an academy order. The governors of the current federation between St Mark's and St George's are currently working towards forming a multi-academy trust.

One teacher left the school at the end of the spring term and has been replaced by a new member of staff. Two new staff have been appointed to the pastoral team.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Senior leaders and governors continue to display the ambition and determination required to bring about improvements across all areas of the school.

The mathematics subject leader is beginning to flourish and show greater confidence in his role. He is being given greater time to undertake activities such as lesson observations and checks on pupils' books. As a result, he has a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. He is using this knowledge to good effect to plan and deliver training and support for teachers and teaching assistants.

The introduction, this term, of a new approach to teaching mathematics has been led well by the subject leader. Training for all staff has ensured that the new approach has been widely embraced. The work that is being undertaken by pupils is already markedly different, allowing greater opportunities for the development of reasoning and problem-solving skills.

The English subject leader has wasted no time in following up the issues, related to the teaching of writing, identified at the time of my last visit. Pupils have a more precise understanding of what they need to include in their writing.

In the main, other initiatives previously introduced by the English subject leader continue to embed and evolve. Her regular checks on pupils' books and lessons help

to ensure that momentum of improvement is being sustained. New initiatives such as a Year 2 reading breakfast club, a parents' reading club and the introduction of a new phonics teaching process in key stage 2 are in their infancy and as such their impact is yet to be seen.

Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They undertake regular checks on the quality of lessons and look at pupils' books to judge the impact of their actions. However, because findings are not systematically recorded, leaders do not always follow up identified weaknesses with the rigour required to ensure that the quality of teaching improves consistently across the school.

Governors continue to have their fingers on the pulse of the school. Regular informal meetings with leaders ensure that the chair of governors is kept abreast of developments and issues as they arise, enabling immediate support and challenge. However, in recent weeks, governors have become distracted by the work required to move the school towards becoming an academy. As a result, the focus and work of the monitoring committee has not been fully effective in holding leaders to account for the impact of their actions on improving teaching and learning.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Evidence seen during my visit shows that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, while continuing to improve, remains inconsistent.

The introduction of a new approach to the teaching of mathematics has raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers are beginning to plan lessons that challenge pupils to think more deeply, through problem-solving and reasoning activities. As a result, in some classes, pupils are now able to approach complex questions with greater confidence. In Year 5, for example, pupils of all abilities showed a good understanding of how to solve ratio problems. The implementation of this new approach is at an early stage and as such is evolving as teachers become more confident and skilled. Leaders are aware that the next step in this process is to give greater consideration, in some classes, as to how the most able pupils can deepen their mathematical understanding further.

In most lessons that I observed, teachers matched tasks well to the differing needs of pupils. However, in a small number of classes, teachers' expectations of pupils were too low. For example, in one class, the most able pupils quickly became bored and learning faltered as they were not inspired by their teacher to think deeply.

Pupils' writing books show that in most classes, teachers are now using their analysis of gaps in pupils' skills to give clearer guidance about what to include in their writing. As a result, the quality of writing has improved, across the school, since my last visit. However, in a small number of classes the quality of pupils' work varies considerably, from month to month, where expectations are not consistently high.

Leaders have introduced new assessment materials for mathematics and reading. These are allowing teachers and leaders to more accurately identify what pupils can and cannot do. Evidence seen during my visit shows that most teachers are now using this information effectively to plan activities that plug gaps in pupils' learning.

The quality of teaching and learning in the early years remains a strength of the school. The redesign of the outdoor environment ensures that children are able to engage in rich and exciting learning experiences outside of the classroom. Learning is underpinned by the excellent relationships that adults have developed with the children. Children listen attentively to their teacher and respond very well during lessons.

Leaders' investment in providing training for teaching assistants is paying dividends in most classes. Their skills, subject knowledge and confidence have grown since my last visit. As a result, in most classes, they are able to provide effective support for pupils. In one class, for instance, learning was considerably enhanced when the teaching assistant expertly asked pupils supplementary mathematics questions that helped to develop a greater depth of understanding. Nonetheless, in a very small number of classes, teaching assistants do not display the same level of skill or knowledge. As a result, the pupils who they are directed to support do not make the progress that they should.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

In lessons that enthuse and challenge pupils to think, attitudes to learning are strong. In Year 6, for example, pupils enjoy their learning because their teacher has high expectations of what they can achieve and provides activities that meet their needs. However, in too many lessons that I observed during my visit, low-level disruptive behaviour was not addressed by teachers with the robustness required to ensure that it did not impact on learning.

The school continues to improve its effectiveness in developing relationships with parents. A number of events, such as the recent party for the Queen's 90th birthday party, have been successful in involving large numbers of parents in school life. Other initiatives, such as developing a key worker system, are at an early stage of implementation and as such it is not yet possible to gauge their impact.

The addition of two new staff to the pastoral team has given the school greater capacity to support pupils and families at an earlier stage. However, as with several other changes that have been implemented this term, it is too early to make judgements about the impact of this change.

The school records any bullying or racist incidents meticulously. Leaders and the pastoral team ensure that all incidents are robustly followed up to ensure that there is no repetition. The recording of less serious behaviour incidents has, in the past, been less useful as there was little consistency in what was logged. However, the

pastoral team have revamped this system and as consequence now follow up teachers' concerns about behaviour effectively.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

School data and pupils' books show that leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching have resulted in pupils now making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics than seen at the time of the previous inspection in 2015.

In writing, in most classes, the proportion of pupils reported by the school as working at the standard expected for their age has improved substantially from the start of the year. Pupils' books show that in many classes, all groups of pupils have made progress in developing their use of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, in several classes, progress needs to be further accelerated to ensure that the gaps in pupils' skills, from the legacy of inadequate teaching, are more quickly plugged.

Likewise, in reading, school data points towards an improving picture. In several classes, the proportion of pupils that leaders say are working at the standards expected for their age has more than doubled since the autumn term. Furthermore, recent school assessments show that improvements in the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) have paid dividends, with significant improvements in the numbers of Year 1 pupils working at the standard expected. Nonetheless, gaps remain in the phonics knowledge of pupils in other classes across the school.

In mathematics, pupils continue to show improvements in their basic skills. Furthermore, the adoption of a new approach to teaching the subject is contributing to pupils deepening their mathematical understanding through greater opportunities to reason and problem-solve. As with reading and writing, data presented by leaders shows increased proportions of pupils working at the standards expected of them.

### **External support**

Leaders make good use of external support. A recent visit to an outstanding school, for instance, has helped the school to introduce a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. Extra funding from the local authority has been used effectively to increase support for pupils with special educational needs.