



8 March 2007

Mrs. Lynne Wilson-Leary
The Headteacher
St Catherine's Church of England VC Primary School
Park Road
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG12 0AW

Dear Mrs Wilson-Leary

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST
CATHERINE'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Lynne Kauffman, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chairman and other members of the governing body, parents, the Diocesan Director of Education and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The School was placed in special measures following the inspection in September 2006. The former headteacher tendered her resignation with effect from 31 December 2006; an acting headteacher led the school from the 20 October 2006 until the end of the autumn term. On the 1 January 2007, the LA seconded an experienced headteacher to the school; her fixed-term contract runs until the 31 August 2009. Staff turnover has been above average in the last 18 months.

Achievement and standards

Attainment on entry to the school is above average and has been for a number of years. In the Foundation Stage pupils are keen to learn, articulate and often have good basic number skills.

In 2006, the national assessments at Key Stage 1 showed that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level 2b in reading and mathematics was close to the national average. However, the number of pupils obtaining the higher levels was below, or in the case of reading well below, the national figures. Performance in writing was below average at all levels. A scrutiny of the pupils' work in Year 2 reveals that inconsistencies in the development of written English remain. Similarly, pupils have yet to develop their higher level number skills.

The results in the 2006 national tests at Key Stage 2 also record inconsistent outcomes, with pupils doing much better in English than in mathematics or science. Results at the higher Level 5 were particularly poor in both mathematics and science. Although the pupils were of above average ability, these outcomes placed them in the lowest 15% nationally for mathematics and in the lower quartile of national results in science. The pupils who performed least well were girls from a White British background and pupils with a statement of special educational need.

A scrutiny of the work currently undertaken by pupils in Key Stage 2 reveals that their understanding of calculation remains inconsistent; tasks provided for more able pupils do not provide appropriate challenge. The limited range of scientific investigations continues to hinder outcomes. The pupils' writing remains below expectations in most classes. Some improvements are evident in English books but literacy skills across the curriculum are inconsistent.

The improvements emerging in teaching have yet to impact on standards across the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2006:

- Raise expectations of pupils' achievement in mathematics and science by introducing a rigorous programme to improve the quality of teaching in both subjects - inadequate progress.
- Raise the quality of pupils' writing and reinforce the development of writing skills in all subjects – inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils enjoy school and have a positive attitude to learning. The school is a harmonious community. Attendance has improved and is in line with the national figure. There have been no exclusions since the start of the academic year. Relationships are good and the pupils feel safe and secure. Popular opportunities in music and inter-school sport help to raise the pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved but significant weaknesses remain. The headteacher accurately evaluates teaching and learning and provides the teachers with helpful feedback, including clear guidance on how to improve. Eleven lessons were observed; two were good, six were satisfactory and three were inadequate. In the best lessons the pupils were consistently involved in their own learning by tasks and questions that engaged their attention. In these lessons the pupils were regularly reminded of their targets and how these applied to the task in hand.

In a number of lessons, whole-class introductions were too lengthy and the pupils' attention wandered. Where teaching was inadequate tasks failed to match the pupils' learning needs; the step between the introduction and the task failed to provide a clear link that would have allowed the pupils to make progress.

Improved assessment and tracking procedures are being developed. However, the focus has been more on lower ability pupils than on ensuring that higher attaining pupils are sufficiently challenged.

In the majority of lessons where support assistants are available they make an important contribution to the learning. However, not all are effectively directed by the teacher and some have yet to take a role in daily assessment opportunities. Assessment for Learning is beginning to make an impact; some staff have begun to interrogate the data in order to plan tasks and the small group interventions required. Some weekly planning shows evidence of post-lesson reflection, annotation and refinement

Pupils have core curriculum targets which have been shared with parents. These are evident in some of the marking; however, in most cases there is an absence of guidance on how to improve.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers make full use of assessment data in their planning so that their teaching is well matched to pupils' individual needs – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school by the recently appointed headteacher are good. She has started to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of September 2006. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are rigorous and objective. The headteacher was invited to join HMI in a joint lesson observation; her judgements were accurate and astute. The assistant headteacher has assumed responsibility for coordinating the intensive support programme (ISP); this work will be reviewed as part of the summer term monitoring inspection. The school has been unable as yet, to allocate the coordination of the Foundation Stage and of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to a qualified teacher.

Since the 20 October 2006, the school has made consistent use of the work of LA advisers and acted on the guidance provided. Core subject coordinators have commented positively on the quality and range of support provided.

The chair of governors informed HMI that HM Customs and Revenue have notified the governing body of irregularities in staff PAYE and National Insurance contributions between 2003 and 2005. During this period, the governing body awarded a contract for staff salaries and contracts to an outside agency that is still in existence. HMCR is seeking financial redress from the governors on this matter. Similarly, the chair of governors informed HMI that a number of staff employed do not have current contracts. The headteacher has sought advice on the insurance implications of this contractual oversight. These matters are being addressed by the appropriate authorities.

The new headteacher reports she has not been given the normal delegated authority to meet the school's financial commitments. There is no evidence that the new headteacher has been appointed to the governing body. Governance is inadequate.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2006:

- Improve leadership and management at all levels and develop a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation that focuses on how pupils' achievement can be improved – satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA's statement of action was appropriately focused on the need to address the weaknesses in provision and leadership identified in the inspection of September 2006. The range and depth of the support provided have already exceeded the commitments made. The headteacher and staff speak warmly of the support provided.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the coordination of inclusion support.
- Develop the coordination of the Foundation Stage and Year 1.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans, and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Jones HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector