

12 July 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 VC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Dick HMI to your school on 5 July 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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, two members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority (LA), a representative of the Diocese of St Albans and nominated staff.

Context

The LA withdrew the governing body's powers of financial delegation at the beginning of May 2007, following the publication of an auditor's report. As a result a LA action group now has responsibility for finance, staffing and premises until delegation is reinstated. The chair of governors and the community governor resigned with effect from the 1 May 2007. Mr Robert

Wilson, a LA governor was elected as Chair of the Governing Body on the 14 May. The deputy headteacher, who taught Year 2, has been absent since the beginning of the January term and has resigned with effect from 31 August 2007. The Year 1 class teacher resigned her post in March 2007. As a result, the Year 1 and 2 classes are currently being taught by long-term supply teachers. A LA school governance clerk has been appointed.

Achievement and standards

The Foundation Stage profile reveals that the pupils' mathematical development and their attitudes to learning are areas of strength. However, basic literacy skills are an area for development.

The unvalidated results of the 2007 Key Stage 1 teacher assessments indicate that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level in reading is close to last year's national average but below it for writing. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in mathematics is higher than last year's national figure.

The unvalidated results of the 2007 Key Stage 2 national tests indicate that the proportions of pupils reaching the expected level in English, mathematics and science are likely to be above average. The proportion of pupils who attained the higher level 5 in the three core subjects was more variable. Outcomes in science are likely to be above average and those in English will probably be close to the national figures; however, the proportion of pupils who secured a higher level 5 in mathematics is likely to be below average.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' positive attitude to learning is a consistent feature of lessons where they are challenged and involved. Behaviour in the corridors, in assembly and in the playground is good. Some immaturity is evident in lessons where 'calling out' remains a feature. Attendance continues to improve and the most recent figures are just above the national average. The school has introduced first day calling to clarify absence with parents. Term time holidays impact on some pupils' learning and a small number of recalcitrant parents do not comply with the statutory requirements to ensure their child attends school. 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 have been extended; the recently produced musical 'Robin Hood' was well received in the local community. Pupils were involved in drafting the newly introduced school values which are having a positive impact on moral and spiritual development.

Quality of provision

Throughout the school there has been a significant improvement in the learning environment. The Foundation Stage pupils have moved into refurbished accommodation in the main building and further work will be completed by the beginning of the new academic year to enhance provision for Key Stage 1. Intensive support from a LA early years specialist has enhanced planning and organisation; the quality of teaching and learning in this area has improved.

The quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 and 2 has improved but some weaknesses remain. The headteacher has maintained a robust system of monitoring and evaluation that provides staff with detailed feedback, including clear guidance on how to improve. An analysis of these assessments indicates an increasing proportion of good teaching; it was noted in the previous monitoring letter that this work correlated with the judgements given by HMI. On this occasion seven lessons were observed; two were good, five were satisfactory and one was inadequate. Another member of the senior management team was invited to conduct joint observations with HMI during this visit. A sound analysis of the strengths and areas for development noted in the lesson, was given although the grade suggested was more generous than the judgement awarded by HMI.

In the best lessons, brisk, effective questioning drew pupils into the topic and focused on ensuring they had mastered the methodological skills required to make progress. In the previous monitoring letter it was noted that in a number of lessons, whole-class introductions were too lengthy; this continues to be a weakness. The quality and consistency of marking remains too variable; where it is effective pupils are provided with clear guidance on how to improve.

The work of learning support assistants (LSA) could be more effectively directed by teachers as many LSA have the skills to provide individual and small group tuition independently. The school is beginning to make good use of assessment information to target intervention strategies.

Curriculum provision meets statutory requirements with positive developments such as musical theatre and lunch time sports coaching provided by the neighbouring secondary school.

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 headteacher are good. She has been proactive in addressing the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection. The weaknesses in teaching and learning have been evaluated and action taken to secure effective practice. With the support of the LA significant steps have been taken to address the issues of teachers' contracts and related financial concerns brought to the governors attention by HM Customs and Revenue. A Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 leader has been appointed for September and the governors intend to advertise the position of deputy headteacher at the beginning of the new academic year. The assistant headteacher has assumed responsibility for coordinating the intensive support programme (ISP); the work of LA consultants in this area has enabled the school to make considerable progress on the use of assessment to inform teaching, learning and management. The recently completed evaluation of pupils' progress has been instrumental in determining the intervention groupings in place for the coming term. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will be reviewed by the new inclusion manager in September.

The new chair of governors brings significant experience to the position. The governing body intends to refine its committee structure at the beginning of the new academic term.

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 - good progress.

External support

The LA has provided significant and particularly effective support to the school and the governing body. The withdrawal of the governing body's delegated powers has enabled the LA to begin to resolve the financial and contractual concerns raised by HM Customs and Revenue. Staff have received

the significant sums of pay arrears to which they were entitled. The secondment of an experienced deputy headteacher for three days per week has enabled the coordination of a wide range of curriculum developments.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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

Yours sincerely

David Jones

H M Inspector