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6 November 2007

Mr I Walker  
Headteacher  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mr Walker

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARK'S C OF E  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Frank Price, Additional Inspector to your school on 31 October and 1 November 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 October 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST MARK'S C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 31 October and 1 November 2007

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the chair and vice-chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

There have been a number of staff changes since the previous visit in March 2007. Two teachers have left and an advanced skills teacher has been appointed. The school is currently advertising for a further advanced skills teacher. Pupils are now taught in parallel mixed age classes.

### Achievement and standards

The 2007 Key Stage 2 English national test results show significant improvement and were the school's highest ever scores. Pupils made considerable gains, with much better writing results and improved performance at the higher Level 5. A range of well conceived support strategies, improved quality of teaching, and more rigorous systems for ensuring that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress all contributed to these improved results. Standards in the current Year 6 appear set to continue this rising trend in English. Approximately two thirds of the pupils in this year group are on track to reach the expected Level 4. Mathematics presents a weaker picture, with only a third of pupils predicted to reach the expected level. Standards in Years 3 and 4 are improving in English and mathematics, with the school tracking system demonstrating that most pupils are now beginning to make better progress over time. Results in the 2007 national tests in science remained broadly similar to those in 2006 but dipped in mathematics. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in English but inadequate in mathematics and science.

At Key Stage 1, the 2007 test results in reading and mathematics improved slightly on those of the previous year and remained similar in writing, with 29% of pupils reaching the average expected Level 2b. Attainment was well below the national average. Standards in the current Year 2 show an improving picture, with approximately 50% of pupils on track to attain the expected level in reading and writing, and 60% in mathematics. Nevertheless, this improving picture masks some underachievement of higher attaining pupils, with none attaining the higher Level 3.

Data for the Foundation Stage shows that children attained well below national and locally expected levels and outcomes were lower than in the previous two years. The school is vigorously tackling the weaknesses in some aspects of provision which led

to these results, but it is too early to judge whether these pupils are now making better progress.

### Personal development and well-being

Attendance has improved significantly since the previous monitoring visit. Robust action has resulted in a significant reduction in levels of absence. Pupils show an increased level of independence and are now more willing to concentrate for sustained periods because lessons are now more challenging and engaging. They are also participating in the recently introduced school council and enjoying engaging in activities to improve their school. The number of fixed term exclusions has reduced since the school's previous inspection in October 2006, as have the numbers of pupils at risk of exclusion. This is due in part to the school's commitment to inclusion and the consistent implementation of positive behaviour strategies, including the use of dedicated learning mentors and its Safari Room provision.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved and the significant proportion of teaching that was regularly inadequate has reduced owing to an increasing understanding of the features of effective lessons. Teachers' planning is generally satisfactory. Planning between pairs of teachers is evident, ensuring that there is an increasing consistency of provision within and across year groups. Lessons usually start with the sharing of learning objectives that are effectively displayed on a board. Introductions to lessons often begin with a recapitulation of previous sessions, which allows pupils to revise and link their previous learning with the new work.

Teachers' improved subject knowledge in the teaching of letter sounds and writing means that basic skills are now systematically taught. Consequently, pupils' literacy skills are improving. There are more opportunities for developing sentence level skills through shared, guided and independent writing. Pupils are now able to write for a sustained period, writing confidently and producing extended pieces of writing.

The pupils' numeracy skills are not as well developed because of weaknesses in teaching. There is considerable underachievement and in the lessons seen there was limited evidence of mathematical skills being applied to problems or real life contexts. In independent tasks, teachers did not always ensure that learning intentions were sharp enough, resulting in pupils being unclear about what they were required to do to meet their targets. A number of recently implemented initiatives are in place to address this issue. The school is working hard to improve teachers' subject knowledge, especially in the incremental development of pupils' skills in calculation.

Resources, such as the interactive whiteboards, are used satisfactorily to engage pupils' interest, less use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support or extend pupils' learning. Importantly, pupils' ICT skills are limited because the subject is not systematically taught throughout the school.

Provision in science is inconsistent across the school. Work and timetable scrutiny indicates sporadic coverage of topics and concepts.

The use of assessment in lessons is developing; displays in each classroom include a clear description of the criteria and prompts for attaining the different levels in English and mathematics. However, these are not always used effectively by pupils. Teachers' use of questioning is improving, some teachers make use of well targeted questions throughout the lesson to assess how much pupils have understood so as to adapt the teaching accordingly. The ends of lessons are now used adequately to evaluate what pupils have learnt and to extend their understanding further.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has effectively used assessment information to discriminate between those pupils with learning difficulties and those pupils who are underachieving. The school now has a coherent, well targeted programme of appropriate identification and support for pupils in English. There are suitable plans in place to extend the intervention strategies to include mathematics. Teaching assistants have benefited from additional training and are now used more effectively to support pupils' learning.

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

- raise standards and improve achievement in English, mathematics, science and ICT by ensuring that the curriculum is better matched to the pupils' stages of development – satisfactory
- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that teachers have high expectations of all pupils, particularly higher attainers, and ensure that assessment information is used rigorously to move pupils on in their learning – satisfactory
- ensure that pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities have clear targets identified in their individual education plans so that their needs are consistently met in lessons – satisfactory.

### Leadership and management

A rigorous programme of monitoring, coupled with an effective programme of professional development, has led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching and in raising attainment in English. However, monitoring is largely undertaken by senior leaders and there is not enough involvement of subject leaders in visiting classrooms. The pupils' progress is now mapped against age related expectations and their prior attainment. Half termly assessments have been introduced giving teachers a clear understanding of the progress expected of all pupils. The school is frustrated by the lack of consultancy support for science available from the LA, which is hampering its efforts to raise standards in this area. However, there are appropriate plans in place to assess and track pupils' attainment and progress in science. New curriculum teams have been set up to provide a system for further curriculum development but it is too soon to assess any discernible impact. The senior leadership team has been further strengthened by the appointment of an advanced skills teacher.

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

- implement rigorous systems to ensure that staff are held accountable for the standards that pupils attain and are very clear as to what they need to do in order to raise those standards and improve achievement – satisfactory.

### External support

The school receives good support at a strategic and operational level from Dudley Learning Support in addressing the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. The school reports that it receives positive and clear points for action. Consultant support in literacy has had an impact upon writing results in school but numeracy support has had less impact. The school receives effective support for leadership and management from the LA through regular monitoring and evaluation visits which identify many actions to be addressed. However, the school needs more detail about the way forward in some areas, such as the support to be provided for science and the Foundation Stage. Furthermore, progress is not reported against the areas for improvement in the school's section 5 inspection report.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics.
- Ensure that ICT is taught systematically across the school.