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10 March 2008

Mrs Julie Barke
The Headteacher
St James CE VA Primary School
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Dear Mrs Barke

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES CE VA
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Suzanne Gerred, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 February 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 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 be appointed subject to the following qualifications that they receive mentor support which is regularly scrutinised by school leaders and governors.

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 and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of the Children and Young People's Service for Northamptonshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST JAMES CE VA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 27 and 28 February 2008

Evidence

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

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has appointed a learning mentor and family support worker, a teaching assistant to support Polish pupils and a teaching assistant responsible for supporting pupils new to the school.

Achievement and standards

Generally, progress continues to accelerate and in some classes, particularly in Years 3 and 4, the school is narrowing the gap between pupils' standards and the national average. The progress made by pupils in the Reception classes remains good. This slows in Year 1, due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, but then accelerates in Years 2, 3 and 4. The progress pupils now make in Years 5 and 6 is much faster in lessons than it was. However, standards remain below average because of the many gaps in their learning caused by the inadequate teaching they experienced in the past.

Better use is being made of assessment information and teachers are carefully tracking pupils' progress. This information is being used successfully to provide additional activities for some groups of pupils, particularly in Year 6. More able pupils are making better progress than they were, but it is not as rapid as it could be because the work they are given is not sufficiently challenging. Additional activities provided for pupils who need extra help with English and mathematics lessons and for those who speak English as an additional language ensure that they make satisfactory progress.

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

- raise standards and improve achievement by establishing clear assessment procedures so that teachers know how well pupils are doing and can plan work matched to their needs – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils continues to be good in lessons and outside the classroom. Strong relationships exist between pupils and adults in school. Consequently, most pupils continue to feel happy and safe. Pupils report that they feel well looked after and appreciate the improvement in the help they get in lessons. The influence of the

school council is strengthening. For example, the members have persuaded older pupils to take part in translating for new arrivals who speak English as an additional language. The significant minority of pupils who start school outside normal admission dates very quickly settle into school, demonstrating their confidence and security in this caring environment. Pupils thoroughly enjoy making a contribution to the community and are rightly proud of the performance the school gospel singers made at the recent opening of a local secondary school.

Attendance is still below average, but it is now steadily rising because of the effective measures taken by the school, with the support of the local authority, to encourage pupils to attend regularly.

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

- work with families of pupils who are frequently absent to improve attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection. The proportion of good teaching has increased, but in a small minority of lessons remains inadequate. Teachers have an increasing understanding of the levels at which pupils should be working. In the best lessons, they are making use of assessment information to plan work that is pitched at the correct level for most groups of pupils. However, this is not consistent, especially for the more able pupils who are not challenged enough. Where teaching is good, pupils demonstrate good levels of independence and take responsibility for their own learning. Teaching assistants involved in additional activities provide strong support for learning. The provision for pupils whose first language is not English is improving and the progress these pupils are making has accelerated.

The recently revised curriculum has been successful in ensuring that pupils experience the full range of subjects. Relevant links are now being better exploited between different subjects so that pupils can refine and apply the skills they learn in mathematics and English lessons. Pupils are now more engaged in practical activities, consequently there are fewer pupils who lose interest in lessons. The impact of these initiatives is evident in the improved achievement of pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4. The curriculum is now more exciting and stimulating. Good use is made of visits and visitors and short term themes, such as 'Off timetable weeks', to develop a range of skills, for example writing, in project work.

Pastoral care continues to be good. Academic guidance has improved. Pupils are now much more aware of their targets in English and mathematics and this has had a positive impact on their attitudes to work and their desire to improve. Where teaching is good, marking supports learning well and offers useful guidance. As a result, pupils know how successful they are and what they need to do to improve their work. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent and there is insufficient

reference to targets. Pupils are not encouraged sufficiently to take pride in the presentation of their work.

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

- plan the curriculum so that pupils experience a variety of subjects, study relevant and interesting topics and have opportunities to develop their basic skills – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The leadership of the headteacher continues to be effective. She has established satisfactory procedures for checking the quality of lessons and the progress that pupils make. This has led to a general improvement in teaching, but has not yet eradicated the small minority of inadequate teaching that remains in school. The leadership of teaching in Key Stage 2 has strengthened since the reorganisation of teaching teams in September 2007. However, weaker leadership in Key Stage 1 means that recommended improvements in teaching have not been consistently applied in some lessons.

The headteacher is now better supported by subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics. The leaders demonstrate greater confidence and the ability to drive school improvement. However, there is insufficient rigour being applied when checking that recent recommendations for improvement, such as the revised marking policy, are being used consistently in all lessons. The leadership for the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language has strengthened considerably since the previous visit. The school has used its own resources very effectively to make recent improvements in provision for these pupils. The chair of governors demonstrates extremely strong leadership and has strengthened the governance of the school so that governors are more knowledgeable and are beginning to hold the school to account for its actions.

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

- involve subject leaders in taking active roles to improve teaching and the curriculum – satisfactory.

External support

The recently amended statement of action produced by the local authority gives clear direction for improvement and the school continues to benefit from the good support of its consultants. Recent evaluations of the quality of teaching, whilst rightly recognising the improvements in the school, have not been sufficiently rigorous in identifying weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide the more able pupils with challenging work so that they can achieve the standards that they should.

- Eradicate the remaining inadequate teaching so that overall quality and consistency continues to improve.
- Ensure that subject leaders check that the recommendations for improvement in provision are applied consistently in all lessons.
- Strengthen the leadership of Key Stage 1 in order to drive improvements in teaching and learning.