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31 January 2008

Mrs S Smith
The Headteacher
St Michael's C of E Aided Primary
Back Lane
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Wiltshire
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Dear Mrs Smith

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

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 January 2008, 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 July 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – 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 and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director for Children and Education for Wiltshire and the Diocese of Salisbury.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST MICHAEL'S C OF E AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 16 and 17 January 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, teaching staff, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with members of staff and pupils.

Context

There have been significant changes to the staffing and class structure since the school was placed in special measures in July 2007. Three teachers were appointed to the school in September and a sixth class created. This has resulted in smaller classes and more with single age groups.

Achievement and standards

The 2007 unvalidated test results have become available since the inspection last July. The results for Year 6 pupils were close to average for English, but significantly below in mathematics and below for science. All subjects showed a decline from the previous two years. The proportion of pupils who gained the higher Level 5 was average for English but below for science and no pupils gained this level in mathematics.

Results in Year 2 showed an improvement on 2006. Writing was close to the national average, but reading and mathematics were weaker. In mathematics, fewer pupils gained the higher Level 3.

Progress across the school was significantly below average in English, mathematics and science and represented a declining trend over the last two years. Analysis of the school's data shows that a significant number of pupils have underachieved in the past and more should be reaching, or exceeding, the expected levels for their age. The school is addressing this legacy of underachievement. Pupils made satisfactory progress in the mathematics lessons observed during the monitoring inspection. Recent assessments carried out by the school show that progress made by most pupils is satisfactory, and in some cases better in mathematics, but variable in reading and writing. A programme for improvement in the quality of science lessons is about to commence. There is still more work to do to improve pupils' achievement across the school and to ensure that more pupils are working at appropriate levels for their age and ability.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- improve pupils' progress and raise standards in all subjects, particularly mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well in and around the school and display good attitudes to learning. They are interested in their lessons and enjoy the opportunities available to them. Children in the Reception class are making clear progress in taking responsibility and making choices through a range of activities.

Quality of provision

The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching, especially in mathematics, with the effective support of LA consultants. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory and some elements were good. The learning environments in classrooms are good. The best lessons showed effective pace which moved learning on at each stage. However, in some lessons, pace can slow and pupils can begin to lose interest. Clear differentiated questioning enables effective challenge to more able pupils. A particularly effective strategy in a Year 4 and 5 class was the clarification of misunderstandings found during the marking of work on the addition of decimals from the previous day. An incorrect addition sum was shown on the interactive whiteboard and pupils were challenged to discuss with their partners the errors they could identify. This enabled the pupils to embed their understanding of place value and move on to more challenging work in the lesson. Teachers refer to, and reinforce, learning objectives in lessons, but not consistently across the school. Some objectives can be a little too challenging given the legacy of underachievement. It is clear that the quality of teaching has improved, but this is yet to work through to higher standards.

The headteacher and staff have developed clear systems for tracking pupils' academic progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Class teachers are held to account for the progress of individuals and groups of pupils at progress meetings held with the headteacher each term. The school now identifies pupils who are underachieving and takes appropriate action. These are positive developments, but it is too early for them to have had a clear impact on achievement.

The school has a clear marking policy and teachers' comments are positive and encouraging. There is evidence of some pupils responding to marking. However, comments from teachers do not always relate to the learning objectives and evidence of marking which informs pupils how to improve their work is inconsistent. Overall, although there has been improvement, there is still some way to go before marking will consistently support good progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- make sure that teaching is closely matched to all pupils' needs and that all teachers have high enough expectations of the standards pupils are capable of attaining – satisfactory
- ensure that regular and frequent checks are made on pupils' attainment and progress – satisfactory
- provide pupils with clear guidance on what they are doing well and how they can improve their performance – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school has a comprehensive action plan which gives a detailed programme of the steps to be taken to develop the areas for improvement identified in the July inspection. The plan displays monitoring and evaluation procedures and realistic timescales. The headteacher and management team have provided clear and supportive leadership since the inspection and have been careful to prioritise the key areas for improvement. They are rightly focusing on improving standards in mathematics in the first instance. Clear monitoring systems for teaching and analysis of work have been established. Teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional development through the diaries linked to the monitoring activities which are regularly discussed with the headteacher.

The headteacher and staff have developed a positive ethos within the school. Together with governors, all staff are committed to bringing about further improvement and there is good teamwork. The school has the loyal support of parents and the community. Governors are developing their role in monitoring the performance of the school. They have restructured their committee framework to focus on the areas for improvement and established a communication group to ensure that parents and the community are informed of the progress that the school is making.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of teaching and the curriculum on pupils' progress and take swift action for improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The LA has reviewed and strengthened its action plan following feedback from Ofsted. The plan is now a well structured programme of training and support which complements the school's improvement plan. The effective support of the advisory headteacher has been instrumental in enabling the headteacher and staff to begin to improve teaching and assessment. Effective support from LA consultants has underpinned this improvement work, particularly in mathematics. For example, consultant support for staff on strategies by which pupils can use estimation to check the reliability of calculations can be seen to be working well in classes. The LA removed delegated powers from governors after the inspection in July and is now providing support in the form of a consultant governor.

Priorities for further improvement

No specific further priorities were identified.