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23 October 2008

Mr Simon Bramwell
Headteacher
SS Simon and Jude Church of England Primary School
Newport Road
Great Lever
Bolton
Greater Manchester
BL3 2DT

Dear Mr Bramwell,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of SS Simon and Jude C of E
Primary School

Following my visit with Christopher Griffin and Diane Auton, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 October 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 April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 of Education for Bolton and the Diocese of Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Linda Murphy
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of SS Simon and Jude CofE Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 October 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, other staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the school became subject to special measures in April 2008 the newly appointed substantive headteacher has led the school part-time for one term and took up the full-time post in autumn 2008. Five teachers have left. New appointments include an additional deputy headteacher, a learning mentor and two teachers seconded from neighbouring schools. One teacher is on maternity leave and a temporary replacement is in post. One of the two deputy headteachers was absent at this monitoring inspection.

Achievement and standards

Although inspection evidence indicates there was some improvement in the results of the Year 6 pupils who left in summer 2008, current standards remain too low in English, mathematics and science. These unacceptably low standards are apparent in both Key Stages 1 and 2 and too many pupils are still underachieving. Evidence also shows a steep fall in the standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008. Standards in the current Year 2 are well below expectations according to assessment data provided by the school. In the current Year 6 fewer than half the pupils are working securely at the expected levels for their age. Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are well below those typically expected for children of this age. Achievement remains inadequate. Many pupils still have a great deal of progress to make in order to catch up the ground lost in previous years.

There are pockets of improvements where teaching is accelerating pupils' progress. For example, in some Year 6 groups pupils are making better progress in extended writing because teachers are engaging them more in their learning and increasing their ability to work independently. However, even this encouraging development is not yet enough to help all these pupils catch up to where they should be.

There are major weaknesses in the development of pupils' key basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Too many pupils are not learning to write clearly. Their spelling is weak. Many cannot use punctuation effectively and lack the necessary knowledge of letters and sounds to help them read accurately. Speaking and listening skills are at a low level. Only a minority of pupils provide extended and well-reasoned answers.

Opportunities to give longer answers are often restricted by a lack of challenge and expectation in teachers' questions. In mathematics, pupils reveal some understanding of the concepts they are learning. Their inability to carry out straightforward, mental calculations quickly and securely, however, places a severe limit on their progress.

Progress on the area for improvement since the inspection in April 2008:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science, particularly in Years 3 - 6 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils report a much improved atmosphere in the school supported by relationships of mutual respect between adults and pupils. They find it a more enjoyable place for a number of reasons. Decisive action taken by the headteacher has led to better behaviour. The use of exclusions is making clear that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. In lessons, teachers are introducing a wider range of learning methods that are engaging and sustaining the pupils' interest. Pupils also say that there are more activities at lunchtime and after school.

The improving trend in attendance noted in the last inspection has continued. Attendance this term is higher than for the same period in 2007. The effective work of the learning mentor is playing a key role in achieving this improvement. Attendance has a high profile among the pupils. They track their class weekly record closely and strive to win the weekly class prizes for the best attendance rate. The learning mentor has also instigated effective initiatives aimed at improving punctuality. The number of latecomers has fallen considerably during the current half term but there remains a minority whose punctuality still requires improvement.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching remains inconsistent and the school has not yet successfully eliminated unsatisfactory teaching which is still evident in a small proportion of lessons. Lessons where teaching is most effective are characterised by teachers' high expectations of what pupils should achieve and by confident classroom management. In these lessons, teachers use questions well to enable pupils to extend and develop their thinking. Working with a partner helps pupils to gain confidence in developing and expressing their ideas. These good lessons are planned to ensure that pupils' learning needs are met and that the content of lessons engages their interests. Where teaching is less successful, tasks are not always purposeful and pupils are not supported sufficiently to enable them to collaborate with each other productively. When planning their lessons, some teachers do not focus sharply enough on bridging the gaps in pupils' learning or on ensuring that activities are matched well to pupils' different learning needs.

The development of systems to track and measure pupils' progress is at an early stage. Problems around establishing a clear picture of the starting points for each year group have not yet been fully resolved. Information about pupils' attainment at the start and completion of the EFYS is not yet analysed fully and this prevents its effective use. The new arrangements have not had time to provide an effective means for helping to raise standards and achievement. Half-termly meetings to hold teachers to account through a review of pupils' progress had not been held at the time of this inspection and staff are not confident enough in the use of data to measure pupils' progress.

A new programme of assessment is beginning to help leaders to identify pupils who require additional support. Although plans have been formulated, extra teaching to boost standards at Year 5 and 6 has not begun. A start has been made in developing individual targets for pupils in English and mathematics but these are not applied consistently across all classes. A new marking policy to give pupils clear direction about how to improve their work and information about how well they are doing is used inconsistently.

Progress on the areas for improvement since the inspection in April 2008:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, particularly teachers' use of assessment information to cater for pupils' of all abilities – inadequate
- Ensure that teachers track pupils' progress rigorously to identify individual needs and eradicate underachievement – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well in partnership. They provide day-to-day direction and have created an improved sense of purpose for staff and pupils. As a result, staff are increasingly positive and are accepting help and support constructively to improve the quality of teaching. The school has recruited new staff and deployed them well at key points. Three staff are 'leading teachers' for the LA and two staff are improving their leadership skills by participating in training to help them as middle leaders. Clear expectations for pupils' behaviour are having a positive impact on teaching and learning. An improved structure to the school day has increased the taught time by five hours each week and pupils report that they like the new timetable. In the EYFS the opportunities for outdoor play are very limited and this adversely affects the breadth of the curriculum in the Reception classes.

The headteacher has a long-term view of the improvements required and this is set out in the LA's and school's joint action plan. The school has wisely taken account of a decline in attendance and included attendance as a priority alongside those identified at the inspection in April 2008. However, the school's action plan is not underpinned by other plans. There are no individual plans for English, mathematics

or science that break down the actions into manageable steps. As a result the detail of the improvements required lack clarity and this makes it difficult to evaluate progress in the short-term. The school has made a start on evaluating its progress but the quality is insufficiently rigorous or systematic. Lesson observations by the deputy headteacher and scrutiny of pupils' work at each key stage give a helpful appraisal of teaching and learning. However, day-to-day monitoring is light-touch and too informal to ensure that progress in improving pupils' learning is sufficiently incremental. The headteacher's termly report to the governing body does not link well to the action plan.

The structure of the school's leadership is about to change but there are no formal agreements about forthcoming changes in roles and responsibilities. Middle managers are at an early stage of leading improvements and very reliant upon the headteacher.

Governors are becoming more active in providing challenge to the leadership. They have begun school visits to see the school's work at first hand. Governors are engaging at an increasingly strategic level and taking on more responsibility for policy decisions. They have accepted the need for change and are receptive to guidance. Increasingly clear leadership from the chair of governors and the work of the school's collaborative working group is focusing on school improvement. With the help of the headteacher an annual cycle of business has been established to aid the smooth working of the governing body and help governors keep abreast of new developments and requirements. Training to support governance is underway. As a result, governors are becoming better equipped to ask meaningful questions about the school's progress. The governing body is working without its full complement: this means more work for fewer people.

The momentum for change has begun and new and appropriate structures are emerging but the impact has yet to be seen.

Progress on the areas for improvement since the inspection in April 2008:

- Make sure that leaders and managers at all levels focus robustly and successfully on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards and achievement – inadequate

- Ensure that the governing body holds the school rigorously to account for its standards – satisfactory.

External support

The LA's monitoring and evaluation of progress is timely and clear. It is well received and helpful to the school. The support is appropriately matched to the school's present priorities. Support for teaching is tailored to the needs of individual staff and this is valuable in developing their teaching skills. Some training, for example, on the systematic teaching of letter sounds is due to be repeated. This is necessary

because of the significant changes in staffing this academic year. The LA's statement of action is fit for purpose and having a beneficial impact on progress made by the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Focus strongly upon the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.
- Provide and implement actions plans to underpin the strategic development plan so that responsibilities, timescale, monitoring and evaluation are clear.