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25 March 2009

Mrs L Speed  
Headteacher  
St James' Church of England Primary School  
Lyme Street  
Haydock  
St Helens  
Merseyside  
WA11 0NL

Dear Mrs Speed

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Peter E Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 March 2009, 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 February 2008. 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 only with the agreement of the lead inspector.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for St Helens.

Yours sincerely

Judith Clarke  
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 March 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, key staff, pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work in lessons were also observed.

## Context

Since the previous inspection, the deputy headteacher has taken up his post. There are two temporary teachers currently in the school because of the possible need to reduce staff numbers. An inclusion manager has not yet been appointed and the headteacher is currently undertaking this role.

## Achievement and standards

Standards are slowly continuing to rise throughout the school, especially in mathematics and science. However, standards in writing are proving more difficult to improve. School assessment information and observations in lessons indicate that standards in writing are rising but very slowly and too few pupils are reaching the standards they should. This is especially so in Key Stage 2. The school has in place new strategies to improve the pupils' handwriting and spelling skills. These are focusing the pupils on what they need to do to improve both in the presentation and accuracy of their written work. Some pupils are now more enthusiastic about their writing and in some classes this is really beginning to have an impact. However, for some pupils, writing remains a real challenge and they lack self-confidence in their own skills. Others understand the importance of accurate spelling and appreciate that they need to work hard with this aspect of their work. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are taking greater pride in their work as they see it improving, especially in Years 2 and 5. In mathematics, pupils understand the need to be accurate with the computation skills and in a Year 3 lesson the pupils were working hard learning their tables. However, the use of mathematical skills in solving every day problems is an area where further improvements are needed. Sometimes, pupils still find it difficult to understand exactly what they have to do to work out the answer to their sum. The school recognises that marking of pupils' work in mathematics needs further development. The marking of pupils' English work is now more consistent and gives appropriate praise and clear next steps for learning.

The influence of the highly structured phonics programme is having a positive impact on pupils' writing in Years 1 and 2. These carefully structured lessons provide the pupils with focused and targeted support, which aids their learning. In addition, teachers are a lot clearer about the levels pupils are working at and this enables



them to be able to plan pupils' work better. Pupils who need extra help with their learning continue to be given support in lessons from the teaching assistants and teachers so that they feel confident with their work and know that they will have extra help should they need it.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupil's achievements in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour in class and around school continues to improve. The attitude of pupils to their learning is improving but remains inconsistent. This is particularly evident in Key Stage 2 where a minority of older pupils are still passive in lessons in spite of the determined efforts and strategies employed by staff to engage and motivate them. A survey conducted at a recent open evening indicates that parents and carers feel that the behaviour and attitudes and the quality and quantity of work produced by their children have all improved. Attendance rates and punctuality have both improved since the last monitoring inspection. This reflects the hard work the school and the authorities have put into building relationships with parents and improving systems. Pupils say they feel safe, and that instances of bullying are decreasing; when they do occur they are quickly and effectively dealt with by the staff. Pupils enjoy school more and value the clubs and activities the school provides for them. They appreciate the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities as school councillors, prefects and house captains, and many act as playleaders and monitors. However, often their achievement, confidence, aspirations and self-esteem are still hampered by their inability to express their thoughts fluently.

The improvement noted in the personal, social and emotional development of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage at the last visit has been further enhanced. Pupils' independent learning is even more evident, and the children show impressive tolerance and consideration for those around them.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning – satisfactory

### Quality of provision

The school has maintained the level of good teaching observed during the previous visit. Gaps remain in pupils' understanding and levels of underachievement but steady progress is being made in putting in the necessary building blocks of learning. Assessment of pupils' learning and levelling of work is far more accurate and this builds in security for the teachers, as they know what level the pupils are working at and this enables them to plan the pupils' next steps in learning. Teachers are far more aware of the pupils next steps in learning, this is especially so in their writing.

Although writing remains an area of weakness, regular opportunities to improve handwriting and spellings are beginning to have a positive impact upon pupils' work.

Attitudes remain inconsistent and this is sometimes reflected in the learning outcomes in lessons. In the best lessons teachers use a range of strategies to help the pupils to explain and articulate their ideas first to their partners and then to the whole class, this is influential in building the pupils' self-confidence and raises self-esteem. In some lessons, however, the teacher spends too long talking at the beginning of the session and does not give the pupils enough time to practise their skills.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly. The outdoor learning environment has now become more established and this has improved children's opportunities for learning both independently and in focused activities. There is now a good balance between adult-led learning and child-initiated activities with carefully targeted activities bringing on the children's learning at a good pace. Children's welfare continues to have the highest priority and as a result, they are happy and becoming increasingly self-confident in their learning. Speaking and listening skills remain a target for improvement in these early years.

The recent focus on developing the curriculum to ensure that learning is both more accessible and relevant to learners is moving on at a good pace. The school is looking closely at re-organising the way it teaches topics to ensure that key skills are taught progressively. Enrichment activities and opportunities, for example, visits to see a production of 'Macbeth' or days when the whole school takes part in scientific investigations, are all geared to ensuring pupils find their learning increasingly exciting and engaging so that they want to learn. The school is, however, mindful of the need to ensure that it is not deflected from its central aim of raising standards in literacy and numeracy.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, eradicating inadequate teaching – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of the curriculum and the overall provision within the Early Years Foundation Stage – good

### Leadership and management

The school has taken significant strides forward since the last monitoring inspection in improving the quality of leadership and management at all levels. It now has a secure senior leadership team made up of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader who are working together successfully to share ideas and plan the next steps of the school's development. The Early Years coordinator and the deputy headteacher continue to support school improvement effectively by providing focused professional development for staff. Staffing is now more stable and the leadership team are beginning to monitor and check that



planned improvements are implemented, secured and built upon. The new deputy headteacher and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader have provided further useful in-service training for staff and this is helping to focus staff on improving pupils' achievement. The school raising achievement plan has been re-evaluated and is reviewed termly so that steps for improvement are finely tuned. This ensures that the required improvements are secured in a shorter time frame. This is beginning to drive school improvement at a brisker pace.

Monitoring of standards and achievement are becoming more rigorous and helping teachers to understand exactly what progress the pupils are making in class and their next steps in learning. Monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observations, scrutiny of planning and pupils' work is also helping teachers to improve their work. Less secure is the way the areas identified for improvement are followed through and checked to secure the required improvement.

The governors have had further training to enable them to ask more pertinent questions of senior leaders. They have an action plan for further improvement to aid them in their work of holding the school to account. This demonstrates their commitment to school improvement. Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. Throughout the school there is a strong sense of purpose and a commitment from all to make the necessary improvements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the leadership and management at all levels, including governance, in rigorously monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, meeting statutory requirements and ensuring that pupils feel safe – good

#### External support

Professional support from a nearby outstanding National Support school continues to aid school improvement with staff from this school supporting individuals to help them improve their teaching skills further. The local authority continues to aid the school through good quality additional support and effective reviews of its work. The school has benefited from a range of local authority consultants who have given targeted specific help to the school. The executive headteacher who works with the school continues to provide much valued advice, evaluation and help to the school.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in February 2008.