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Mrs L Speed
Headteacher
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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 Stephen Wall, additional inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors and the Director of Children and Young Peoples Services for St Helens.

Yours sincerely

Judith Clarke
Lead Inspector

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

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with 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

The staffing structure remains similar to that of the previous monitoring visit. There are two temporary teachers currently in the school.

Achievement and standards

School assessment data and the provisional end of key stage national test results and assessments show that there has been a considerable improvement in standards and achievement throughout the school. Inspection evidence supports this improvement, which is particularly evident in Year 6, where the provisional results in the national end of key stage tests indicate that standards have improved significantly from 2008. It is especially so in English, although pupils' writing skills still lag behind their mathematical and science skills. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 also point to an improved position from 2008, although more remains to be done to stretch the more-able pupils. The school has continued apace with the drive to improve pupils' presentation of their work and handwriting, which are now much improved. This is the result of a systematic and sustained focus to improve these aspects throughout the school. Spelling remains a weakness, but an increased focus on phonics and accuracy of writing is bringing about improvement. Pupils' books show that writing skills are improving. They are increasingly aware of the individual progress they have made with their writing tasks. However, there still remains some underachievement, highlighted in the school's tracking systems. This is especially so in Key Stage 2. In Years 1 and 2 the improved presentation of work in books shows how successful teachers are becoming in instilling in pupils a real sense of pride in their work and how much they value their efforts. This is encouraging further improvement. Some of the younger pupils are keen to point out that that to write properly you have to sit properly on your seat! Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to be supported effectively in class and so they succeed in their learning.

The school has improved further its use of tracking and assessment data. This enables an identification of those individuals and groups who need extra support and help with their learning. These pupils become a focus for improvement and their performance is rigorously checked. This strategy is clearly improving pupils' progress.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science – good

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school continues to improve. This is evident in their polite and respectful manner and in the way in which they work and play together harmoniously. Teaching assistants continue to work effectively with pupils whose behaviour is most challenging to make sure that these pupils are fully included in classroom activities. Pupils now have a more positive attitude to learning although a few are still too passive in lessons. Pupils say they enjoy learning most of all when they are actively involved in lessons. Some say, however, that they still spend too long listening rather than doing. Pupils are certainly enjoying school a lot more. This is seen in their much improved attendance and punctuality. It is also evident in the improvement in the presentation of their written work. Opportunities to take on responsibilities, for example, becoming prefects and house captains, are increasingly helping pupils to develop a sense of caring for others and are raising their levels of self-esteem. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is steadily improving as standards and achievement in literacy and numeracy rise.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Quality of provision

The school has maintained the level of strong teaching observed during the previous visit, with steady and sustained progress being made in eradicating underachievement. Although writing remains an area of weakness, teachers are working really hard to help pupils understand how they might improve their work in this subject. For example, all classrooms now have reminders and prompts to help pupils understand what they have to do next to improve further. Lesson planning is becoming increasingly clear and indicates what pupils are to learn. Learning objectives are shared with pupils at the start of the lesson so that pupils are much clearer about the learning intention. Although improving, in some lessons, teachers still talk for too long and there are fewer opportunities for the pupils to practise their skills. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is also improving. It is increasingly supportive, indicating clearly the next steps in learning and thus helping pupils to be very clear what they must do to improve further. Teaching assistants continue to be used effectively to give targeted support and help, especially to less able pupils, so that they are not disadvantaged.

The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved in leaps and bounds. There is a wide range of appropriate activities with a good balance between teacher-led and child-initiated activities. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the school continues its drive to match the curriculum more closely to learners' needs. The emerging creative curriculum

is designed to add extra excitement and relevance to learning. It is encouraging pupils to be more active as learners and is beginning to break down the passive approach, which a few pupils still display. There is no doubt that this is starting to have the desired effect. Well thought out enrichment activities are ensuring that learning continues to encourage engagement and enjoyment. Pupils are enthusiastic about the special events the school puts on for them such as multicultural week and they speak glowingly about the science day, which really involved them and fired their imaginations through a range of 'hands on' exciting experiments.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved even further. Better assessment procedures are enabling the school to pinpoint children's skills on entry to the Reception class as being well below average in all areas of learning, with aspects of communication, language and literacy and calculation particularly low. As a result of recognising these weaker aspects of the children's skills, the school has built in extra support to help to eradicate them. Consequently, improvement in achievement is evident. The children are now more independent and self-confident. For example, during the inspection they went 'on safari'. They put on their animal masks and rucksacks and set off on a long journey across the school field in their search for wild animals! They showed good perseverance and determination as they searched for animals to check off on their recognition sheet. Parental support continues to be strong and well fostered by the school. This was evident in the way in which the children had been prepared for their safari, with binoculars, magnifying glasses, pens and notepads brought in ready for their expedition.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

The school continues to make great strides in developing leadership at all levels. The responsibilities of senior leaders are firmly established and their work is having a positive effect on school performance. Staff report that they have become increasingly more accountable for the progress pupils make in their class and are more keenly mindful of the progress of different groups of pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Regular meetings about pupils' progress with the deputy headteacher mean that pupils' performance across the whole school is monitored and checked regularly. The school's Raising Achievement Plan continues to be reviewed termly and school improvement continues to be driven forward at a brisk pace. Staff report that professional support from a nearby outstanding national support school and the local authority has been a significant aid to the development of their professional skills and expertise. The governors continue to support the school and increasingly hold leaders to account. They have made difficult decisions regarding the need to

restructure Key Stage 2 classes in the next academic year and have been mindful of financial constraints and parental expectations.

Progress since the last visit on the area 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

The local authority continues to give aid to the school through additional support and effective reviews of its work. The executive headteacher who works with the school continues to help it improve further.

Priorities for further improvement

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