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19 June 2009

Mrs Estelle Smith
The Acting Headteacher
Bemerton St John Church of England Aided Primary School
Lower Road
Bemerton
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP2 9NW

Dear Mrs Smith,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bemerton St John Church of England Aided Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Reid to your school on 17 June 2009, 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 January 2009. 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bemerton St John Church of England Aided Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with staff, governors, pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Immediately following the inspection, the headteacher was suspended and has just recently resigned. The local authority appointed an experienced adviser to lead the school, aided part time by a headteacher of a local successful school. The chair of governors has continued to lead fellow governors following the sudden death of the former chair immediately prior to the inspection. There have been no changes to the teaching staff. The number of classes is reducing to six from September meaning some classes will have mixed ages in Years 3 to 6.

Achievement and standards

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress in the Reception class and they generally reach the standards expected for their age. Their achievement is broadly even across the different areas of learning, although developing more specific skills through outside play is an area for development. Across the school, pupils continue to reach average levels of attainment. Writing and number skills develop systematically and these skills are used to a satisfactory level in other subjects. More able pupils still fall short of reaching their potential due to a lack of challenge in their work. The school's checks on pupils' progress and indications from recent national tests point to possible rises for pupils in Year 2. There may be a dip in some subjects, such as mathematics for pupils in Year 6, but their current work indicates they reach average levels in their work. Pupils make satisfactory progress in other subjects such as information and communication technology, where they use computers competently. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities keep up with classmates well, often due to the good levels of support they receive in and out of class.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour and pupils' attitudes to learning are both good as a result of boisterous behaviour being reduced. This ensures that the ethos of the school is now calm and purposeful. As one pupil said, 'Everyone is more cheerful now.' Pupils say they are clear about what is expected of them and appreciate the clearer boundaries. The system for promoting good behaviour and opportunities for physical activity is aided by playground leaders who promote play and encourage participation in physical exercise amongst fellow pupils. Pupils develop good relationships generally and

enjoy lessons where they are most actively involved. They talk with some knowledge about other countries, mainly through topics they study, although their deeper understanding of others' beliefs and cultures represented in the United Kingdom is still a weaker area of their development.

Quality of provision

Lesson observations conducted with the acting and consultant headteachers confirmed the accuracy of their views of the quality of teaching and learning, which is slowly beginning to show signs of improvement. Teaching is at least satisfactory and some aspects are good. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Activities are planned to take into account indoor and outdoor learning and basic skills are taught systematically. Across the school, detailed lesson planning shows that teachers are aware of pupils' general levels of ability. More able pupils, however, are not always challenged sufficiently and there is scope for them to undertake more difficult work at a different starting point from their classmates. Some activities have an increasing emphasis on exciting ways to motivate pupils' interests, such as buying items at an imaginary beach kiosk. However, some teaching still 'plays safe' resulting in pupils making secure, rather than rapid, gains in their learning. This also connects to the improvements being made in curriculum planning, which now incorporates more opportunities to be creative. The curriculum is extended for some through additional activities, such as drama in Year 6, guitar lessons and whole school trips; but creative class-based approaches are at an early stage and not a consistent feature throughout the school. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to supporting pupils, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Following the inspection, steps were taken quickly to make sure that the most urgent aspects of safeguarding requirements were put in place. Overall, care, guidance and support are now satisfactory. Health and safety audits and risk assessments are now in place and carried out regularly. These are largely fit for purpose and identify potential hazards clearly. Reporting of incidents is largely systematic, although some procedures could be streamlined to ensure they are easier to track. In terms of academic guidance, pupils benefit from ongoing guidance in their books. Teachers usually point to the strengths and weaknesses in their written work, although this varies in quality between classes. Target setting arrangements are improving, and pupils have a better idea of what they need to do to improve to the next level, although this is currently confined to their literacy work.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the proportion of good teaching by matching work closely to the full range of pupils' abilities, including those who are more able, and ensuring pupils are clear about their next steps in learning – satisfactory
- ensure all the legal requirements related to safeguarding pupils are fully implemented and regularly checked – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Progress with this issue was aided by the quick appointment of a local authority adviser to lead the school, supported by the headteacher of an outstanding school. The local authority, staff and governors produced an action plan. This process was very helpful in giving staff ownership of the areas for improvement and in exploring and sharing what needs to be done. The plan helped direct efforts where they will have a quick impact, noticeably the improvements to safeguarding and in improving communication with parents. The latter has been tackled particularly well and parents confirmed that 'school leaders are more accessible', 'the acting headteacher is doing a really good job', and that their 'children are happier'.

Securing the school's long-term leadership, including developing the roles and responsibilities for senior and middle leaders, is now a priority to build the capacity to improve. That said, the acting headteacher and additional headteacher have successfully maintained staff morale and secured the existing strengths of the school. Staff have benefited from working with colleagues from another school. This has helped improve planning and, to some extent, the quality of teaching. The local authority is keen to continue its level of support, but recognises the need to reduce the help given by the additional headteacher from September. This is a move designed to encourage existing teaching staff and subject leaders to develop the capacity to move the school forward. Members of the relatively new governing body have attended training run by the local authority to clarify their roles and responsibilities. The chair has guided fellow governors effectively. Governors recognise the issues facing the school and are determined that they are successfully addressed. A monitoring schedule is in place and the roles of committees are taking shape. The schedule is clear but could be more specific in outlining the tasks that are needed to foster the challenge needed to improve the school further. This also must include the plans that the diocese and the local authority have for starting the process of appointing a new headteacher as soon as is practical.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen the clarity of direction offered by the leadership, improving the effectiveness of communications and ensuring management tasks are carried out systematically – satisfactory
- ensure governors and staff leaders are trained and fully involved in implementing and sustaining rigorous checks on the success of the work of the school – satisfactory
- establish an effective working partnership with all parents in order to improve their confidence and support for the school – good.

External support

The local authority has provided good support, predominantly through arranging and funding the interim leadership arrangements. When the school was judged to require special measures, the local authority acted promptly, partly because it had been identified as being in need of support previously. Amendments to the

statement of action were satisfactorily made. This now means the statement of action is good and the many of the tasks outlined have been completed. The governing body has received support, training and guidance from the acting headteacher, who also reports regularly to the local authority. Since the inspection in January 2009, various advisory staff have supported the school and the links developed between the staff of the outstanding school and the staff of Bemerton St John are starting to take effect. There is now a need to revise the action plan to take account of the changes made so far and to plan to secure the future leadership and management of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that tasks and teachers' questions challenge more able pupils consistently in lesson activities so they make quicker progress.
- Enable senior managers and subject leaders to develop their capacity to move the school forward in its key issues and in promoting pupils' progress.
- The governors, diocese and local authority should start the process of appointing a new headteacher as soon as is practical.