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14 July 2009

Ms C Davies
The Headteacher
St Matthias CE Primary School
Cromwell Road
Malvern Link
Worcestershire
WR14 1NA

Dear Ms Davies

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Matthias CE Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Usher-Clark to your school on 1 and 2 July 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 – generally satisfactory with more rapid progress since the beginning of the summer term 2009.

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, the Diocesan Director of Education for Worcestershire and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Matthias CE Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, the chair of governors, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Following the inspection in January 2009 the headteacher resigned and left the school at the end of February 2009. The local authority and governors recruited an acting headteacher until the end of the spring term 2009. The deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the spring term to take up a post in another local authority. Subsequently a second acting headteacher was recruited and she joined the school at the beginning of the summer term 2009. The acting headteacher has since been appointed as the school's substantive headteacher. The Key Stage 1 coordinator has been appointed as the new deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher has been recruited on a one year contract to lead developments in Key Stage 2 and mathematics and teach pupils in Year 6.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain too low and often well below the levels expected for the pupils' ages, particularly in writing and mathematics. The current Year 2 pupils are underachieving in writing and reading, although standards in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 are generally higher, with just over three quarters of Year 2 pupils reaching the level expected for their age. In Key Stage 2 rates of progress are too slow. As a result, the gap between what the pupils are currently attaining and what they should be achieving for their age is far too wide. Many pupils have significant shortfalls in their knowledge and understanding in numeracy and writing, and key skills in each subject area are weak. Only half the current Year 6 pupils have reached the level expected for their age in writing and mathematics. There are signs that standards are rising in some year groups, for example in Years 1 and 5, although work in pupils' books shows clearly that progress over time is inadequate. The quality of presentation in many books is poor and standards in writing are particularly low. As in Key Stage 1, there is significant underachievement throughout Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils generally behave well, have positive attitudes and are welcoming to visitors. Relationships are usually good. Many pupils speak confidently about what they are doing in their lessons and often try to do their best, even when their work is too difficult or too easy. In a few lessons however, pupils are too passive and

when they are required to focus on group and individual tasks, they struggle to complete their work because they have not been sufficiently motivated or engaged in their learning.

The school has introduced new systems and procedures for improving pupils' attendance and punctuality. These include regular and frequent contact with all parents to reinforce the link between good attendance and good achievement. The decline in pupils' attendance has been halted, but there has been no significant improvement since last year, and attendance is still too low. The attendance rate for the end of the academic year 2008 was 93.7%, with the school expecting a similar overall rate by the end of the summer term 2009. The rate of persistent absenteeism has fallen from 4.5% to 2.7%. Pupils' punctuality has improved since the beginning of the summer term 2009. In the spring term 2009, 93 pupils were late for a total of 399 teaching sessions. In the summer term so far this has reduced to 68 pupils arriving late for a total of 280 teaching sessions.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- improve communication with parents in order to reverse the decline in attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning ranges from good to inadequate. Overall there are too few good lessons and too many that are either inadequate or barely satisfactory. This is because teachers' planning is weak, inconsistent and does not take enough account of pupils' different learning needs. The pupils' work is not matched sufficiently to what they know, understand and can do. Consequently, the pupils are frequently given work to do that is either far too easy or too difficult and, as a result, they make slow progress in lessons. Too much of the teachers' planning is aimed at covering the National Curriculum units of work for the pupils' ages, rather than making sure that work is matched accurately to the pupils' current attainment levels. For example, in some classes pupils' ability levels range from Level 1 to Level 4. Despite this, lesson plans often ask pupils to complete work that is pitched at the same level of difficulty, and does not take enough account of the skills and knowledge pupils need to learn. This is particularly evident in writing and numeracy lessons.

The quality of work in pupils' books, including presentation, is generally poor, particularly in writing. Too much of the pupils' work is left unmarked by the teacher and there are too few constructive comments to help the pupils know what they need to do to improve. Marking is inadequate overall, although better in Years 1 and 5 than in other year groups.

In the few good lessons pupils were challenged to improve on their previous work, and were given tasks to complete which helped them achieve the lesson objectives. The pace of learning was brisk and teachers' subject knowledge was secure. The quality of provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory.

Children are currently making satisfactory progress, although girls are doing much better than boys. The gap between the boys' achievements and those of the girls is far too wide, given that boys' and girls' attainment was very similar when they entered the nursery.

There are very few occasions when pupils spend too long listening to lengthy introductions and explanations by teachers, although active engagement is still a long way off because pupils' work is not matched well enough to their different starting points and capabilities. Consequently progress rates in lessons are often far too slow. Teachers are aware that there is much to do in order to increase the rate of pupils' progress and improve the quality of their lessons. They welcome the opportunity to discuss how they can improve their work and are committed to doing so. All staff appreciate and welcome the positive leadership and direction provided by the headteacher since she joined the school.

The headteacher and senior leadership team are currently in the process of setting more challenging targets for pupils' progress and expect to conclude this process before the end of the summer term 2009. The revised targets are then expected to be used to help improve teachers' planning.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- set more challenging targets for pupils' progress and ensure these are used by all teachers to plan work that is suitably demanding for individual pupils and to provide appropriate guidance to pupils on how their work can be improved – inadequate
- ensure pupils make more progress in lessons by ensuring that they spend less time listening and more time actively engaged – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has brought a much needed sense of purpose, coherence and educational direction to the school's work. She has a clear vision for future improvement and an accurate understanding of what needs to be improved. Strategic planning is becoming secure and much has been achieved during the summer term to build strong foundations for further improvement. In a relatively brief period of time the headteacher has carried out a thorough review of many of the school's day to day management procedures, and put in place a series of actions and policies to improve provision. These are timely and appropriate. In addition, she has begun to make important improvements to the quality of leadership, particularly monitoring and evaluation. There is a coherent and systematic approach to checking the quality of lessons and pupils' work, and teachers are receiving some useful feedback about improving their teaching skills. However, the feedback to teachers is not yet sufficiently precise, and targets for improvement are sometimes too broad. Similarly there are no review dates for checking that improvements have been made.

The very recent introduction of a systematic and robust approach to assessing pupils' performance and tracking their progress has the potential to improve the

quality of teaching and learning and raise standards and achievement for all pupils. The headteacher recognises that this is one of the most significant challenges facing the school in the short and medium term. Some sound work has been carried out to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments and moderate their judgements. This is essential, as much of the assessment information available to the school prior to the beginning of the summer term 2009 is unreliable.

The headteacher receives sound support from the senior leadership team. The deputy headteacher has produced a helpful action plan for raising standards in literacy and the assistant headteacher has begun to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils. These are useful developments but have not yet been translated into tangible and measurable success, particularly to raise achievement and standards and eliminate weaknesses in teaching and learning.

There is considerable confusion between the school, governors and the local authority on which group has responsibility for leading and managing the afternoon nursery provision. This should be resolved as a matter of urgency and without delay.

Currently the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet national recommendations. Plans are in place to improve the security of the school site by the beginning of the autumn term 2009.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress more rigorously, drawing up and implementing plans to eliminate the areas of weakness – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority is meeting the commitments set out in its statement of action and action plan. The school's improvement partner has a clear view of what needs to be done to bring about further improvement and provides a good balance of challenge and support for the headteacher. The local authority continues to monitor the school's progress carefully and is deploying a number of key staff generally effectively to tackle areas of weakness, although their work is not yet having enough impact eliminating weaknesses in teaching and learning. The school's link adviser, who is also the improvement partner, and headteacher are about to produce a raising attainment plan, linking the many initiatives already in place to the central aim of raising standards for all pupils. This should provide the school with a structured and systematic framework in which to coordinate actions and measure success.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, raise standards in writing and mathematics.