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1 December 2009

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

Dear Mrs Smith

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

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge  
Additional Inspector



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

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 19 November 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including observing parts of lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, advisory headteacher, pupils, senior staff, chair of governors and a small number of parents.

## Context

Since the last inspection, the school has reduced its number of classes by one and there are now mixed-aged classes in Years 3 to 6. In the Reception class, a new temporary member of staff, who started in September, is covering a maternity leave until July 2009. The support provided by a headteacher from a nearby school has now stopped, having been reduced to one day a week in September. The governors advertised for a permanent headteacher to start in January 2009, but there were too few applicants for the post.

## Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Children in the Reception class are settled and behave well. They are making better progress in learning key skills, such as writing, and liked writing greetings for a birthday card and using modelling materials to make a birthday cake. Their knowledge and understanding of the world is fostered appropriately as are their social skills. Their physical development is hampered by the limited size and quality of resources in the outside activity area. In Years 1 and 2, pupils' progress is improving, as shown both in class work and in the latest national assessments for this age group. Work seen in Year 2 reflected pupils' confidence to write simple alliterative sentences. The progress pupils make in Years 3 to 6 is more variable. However, a greater focus on the needs of the most able is paying off in some classes, as activities are more demanding. In Year 6, for example, pupils enjoyed working out mathematical challenges and more able pupils completed more difficult tasks with confidence. In some classes, pupils do not always make the strides in their learning and understanding of which they are capable, which slows their progress. Those pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities keep up with classmates owing to the good support of teaching assistants and helpers.

## Other relevant pupil outcomes

Although it was not a focus for the visit, pupils' behaviour is now much improved. The calmer atmosphere now apparent within lessons is influencing pupils' progress for the better in many classes and pupils report that play-times are safe and enjoyable. Pupils also speak enthusiastically about how having mixed ages helps



them make a wider circle of friends. At play-times activity levels are high, with older pupils helping out as playground buddies. Healthy eating still has a high profile and one pupil's enthusiasm for eating cucumber slices as a snack proved the point.

### The effectiveness of provision

Since the last monitoring visit, aspects of teaching have improved. The more consistent use of success criteria in lessons is helping pupils judge their own pace and direction of learning. This is particularly true for higher-attaining pupils. Teachers now plan more clearly for pupils of differing abilities and many, but not all, activities capitalise on the ability of some pupils to be able to start at a more challenging point. The pupil progress meetings now enable staff to see if any are falling behind and to gauge the progress of all pupils. Staff manage pupils well, which results in their being keen to learn. The children in the Reception class like the range of activities, although helpers are not always quick enough to spot those who need extra help or to challenge to get greater benefit out of the activity. The 'learning journals' being developed are useful for both staff and parents to assess how children are making progress. The curriculum is practical in nature and pupils say that learning is generally 'fun'. This was evident during the visit, when activities ranged from problem solving to applying the skills of measuring, to investigating insulation in homes. Pupils were not, however, always fully aware of how learning these skills can help them in everyday situations.

The school has continued to review arrangements for pupils' care and welfare. The youngest pupils in the school are looked after well, as are those with severe special educational needs. The requirements for safeguarding pupils are met, as are the routines for checking visitors to school, recording information on staff appointments and meeting legal requirements.

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 relating to safeguarding pupils are fully implemented and regularly checked – good.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher, supported by a colleague from a nearby school, have continued to focus on key areas for improvement, such as the quality of teaching, relationships with parents and securing robust procedures to ensure the safeguarding of pupils. These efforts have been partly successful, as those good elements of teaching are increasing in number. The reduced external support since September is enabling the permanent senior staff to be more involved in support and monitoring, although the focus on what key aspects will improve pupils' learning



faster is not yet sufficient. Due to the concerted efforts of the acting headteacher, relationships with parents have improved further since the last visit. Parents report that they feel more listened to, and knowledgeable about what goes on. Governors are planning to appoint a new headteacher for September 2010 and have secured the acting headship until then. This is providing the stability needed for the day-to-day running of the school and, to some extent, its longer-term needs. However, the governors appreciate the need to secure the permanent leadership of the school as soon as is practical. A number of new governors have joined the governing body since the last visit. While some governors are proactive in visiting the school, not all governors are yet clear about their role as critical friend or about visiting the school to help ensure rigour in monitoring the school's work.

Progress since the last visit 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 – good
- ensure that 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 continues to support the school well, particularly in providing additional help through advisory support for subjects and for specific age groups, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage. The continued financial support for the National Leader of Education, to lend advice to the acting headteacher and facilitate training with staff from her National Support School, has been effective and appreciated by those involved. The local authority has also been in close discussion about the future appointment of a permanent headteacher and the ways in which the school can operate within its budget. The financial shortcomings are proving a more difficult area to resolve as they were the result of some past budgeting decisions. The requirement that the school now begins to operate within its resources, and the options available to achieve this, have been discussed with the governors. The support of the national leader in education has been effective in supporting the staff and acting headteacher. Although this support has now ended, this is helping the school to operate and develop using its own internal resources.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Help develop teaching further by focusing monitoring on improving the pupils' learning.



- Help new governors become clear about their roles and devise a structured programme of governor visits to aid and inform their decision making.
- Ensure that arrangements for the appointment of a permanent headteacher are clarified and started early next term.