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16 December 2009

Mrs H Pritchard  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School  
Stoney Lane  
Kidderminster  
Worcestershire  
DY10 2LX

Dear Mrs Pritchard

Special measures: monitoring inspection of School

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 December 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 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, the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire and the Director for Education for the Worcester Diocese.

Yours sincerely

John Laver

Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St. Mary's Church of England Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 December 2009

## Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work and met with the headteacher, staff, pupils, parents, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

## Context

Since the time of the inspection in May 2009, a new headteacher has been appointed to the school and there have been other changes to the teaching staff and the senior leadership team.

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

The most recent national test results, published soon after the last inspection, showed very low standards of pupils by the age of 11, with all groups of pupils making inadequate progress from their entry into Year 3. This represented a further decline on previous low results. However, pupils' current work shows that standards in key subjects, particularly English and mathematics, have begun a gradual but discernible upward trend. Standards are still well below average, particularly in writing, speaking and mathematical skills. For a number of year groups in particular, this reflects a legacy of underachievement resulting mainly from previous instability in staffing which meant classes experiencing frequent changes of teachers. Standards are also well below average because in some classes there is a large concentration of pupils with specific learning needs, either relating to emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or to weaknesses in key literacy and numeracy skills. Until recently, pupils' poor behaviour and poor attitudes towards learning also restricted their progress. The school's more rigorous monitoring and tracking systems accurately reflect the improvements that have begun to take place. There have been major changes in staffing and there is now a higher proportion of good teaching, although teaching is satisfactory overall. Pupils' attitudes towards learning have improved and are now satisfactory overall, because teachers manage behaviour more consistently. They also now plan more effectively for the range of ability in their classes, so that pupils of all abilities have a better opportunity to make progress in lessons. Progress is no longer inadequate, and is good in many lessons. However, overall achievement is satisfactory, because of the continued inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning.

Although pupils report that they enjoy school, attendance remains well below the national average. The attendance of older pupils has improved since the previous inspection, but it remains very low for younger pupils, partly because there have

been high levels of illness this term. Low levels of attendance also reflect the difficulty the school has encountered in persuading some parents of the importance of their children regularly attending school, particularly if standards are to rise. The new leadership has begun to address some of the issues surrounding attendance. For example, there are now more rigorous procedures to enforce attendance and punctuality, combined with rewards to encourage pupils to attend more regularly. The school has also begun to use outside agencies to liaise more directly with parents and encourage a more positive attitude towards attendance. Although improving attendance remains a key area for further development, the new leadership has made a satisfactory start to the process of improving attendance, given the relatively short time that it has been in post.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve standards and achievement by the end of Year 6 by ensuring that teachers expect more of the pupils and plan work that is pitched at the right level for them all - satisfactory
- improve attendance by working more effectively with parents and pupils – satisfactory.

#### The effectiveness of provision

The school now has a more stable teaching force for pupils in Years 3 to 6, and teachers have an increased understanding of how to improve pupils' knowledge and skills, particularly in the key subjects of English and mathematics. This is mainly because of the extensive professional development undergone since the previous inspection. Teachers' expectations have risen and most of the time they manage behaviour well, which is an improvement from the time of the previous inspection. There are still inconsistencies in teachers' understanding of what pupils can achieve. However, most lessons are better paced and more challenging for pupils, and in the best lessons there is good use of assessment to help pupils improve their work. In these lessons, pupils know how well they are doing and how they can move to the next level. For example, a literacy lesson was observed in which the teacher used pupils' work from the previous day imaginatively to show other pupils how they could improve the range and accuracy of their writing. Pupils are increasingly involved in their own assessment, although less able pupils still require a lot of support. Marking is sometimes helpful to pupils, but teachers' comments are not always followed up by pupils. Vulnerable pupils and those with other particular learning needs are increasingly benefiting from a range of strategies to improve literacy and numeracy skills, and the work of support staff both inside and outside mainstream lessons is now targeted more effectively. Therefore although overall teaching and learning are now satisfactory, they have improved since the previous inspection.

The school's leadership has made considerable changes to the curriculum since the previous inspection. The curriculum is satisfactory, but improving. In addition to improving the teaching and learning of English and mathematics through better planning and a better match of work to pupils' abilities, the leadership has modified the structure of the curriculum. A process has begun by which the curriculum focuses on topics which link key skills and subject content in a more meaningful way for pupils, for example in the 'Our Local Environment' and 'Good Citizens' projects. Although at an early stage of development, pupils have enjoyed the opportunity to have a voice in selecting topics for their class. Increased enthusiasm for learning is reflected in improved behaviour and progress. There is now more continuity in pupils' learning, and this curriculum development, allied with improved tracking of progress, has resulted in teachers having a clearer picture of how well pupils are gaining skills and knowledge and what more needs to be done to raise standards.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that the curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is responsive to their needs and includes sufficient opportunities for them to practise and improve basic skills in literacy and numeracy by using them in different subjects – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management are currently satisfactory and improving. A new leadership team has been established since the previous inspection. It is committed to raising expectations and tackling the underachievement of pupils in Years 3 to 6, while maintaining the school's inclusive ethos. This gives pupils the assurance that they are valued as individuals and that all have the opportunity to succeed. Leaders have radically modified the procedures for assessing pupils' standards and monitoring their progress. There are now regular assessments, which are moderated for consistency. Assessment data is analysed, progress monitored, and pupils given appropriate targets to help raise achievement. This information is shared with class teachers, who use it increasingly to inform their planning. The leadership has a better understanding of how both individuals and groups are doing, and this has had a positive impact on teachers' expectations in the classroom. There are now strategies and appropriate planning in place to help the school reach the ambitious but achievable targets agreed with the local authority. School leaders, staff at all levels and the governing body now share an accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses and areas for development. Several of the initiatives to improve provision and standards are not yet fully embedded and have yet to have a good enough impact on pupils' achievement. The leadership understands this and also acknowledges that, in order to tackle underachievement successfully, it needs to engage more effectively with parents, particularly to improve attendance and to make parents genuine partners in their children's learning. Links between the school and its partner schools are not developed enough to have had a significant impact upon improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders and managers at all levels make better use of information about how well pupils are doing in Years 3 to 6 to identify and tackle underachievement as soon as it arises – satisfactory.

### External support

The local authority has provided the extensive guidance and specialist support necessary for the school to address its priorities for improvement. The local authority's statement for action has proved an effective mechanism to date in supporting the school through a difficult transition period for the new leadership. There is a good working relationship between the local authority and the school, and also between the school and its school improvement partner, who has provided extensive support. The school greatly values the local authority's efforts to support the school in resolving staffing issues and in improving provision.

Priorities for further improvement:

- ensure that the quality of teaching is further improved so that it consistently matches the best practice in the school, particularly in raising the expectations of what pupils can achieve and using assessment information rigorously to raise standards and improve progress in lessons
- forge closer links with parents to improve attendance and involve them more in support of their children's learning.