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Mrs S Cross  
Headteacher  
St Mark's C of E (A) Primary School  
Wood Terrace  
Shelton  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST1 4LR

Dear Mrs Cross

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mark's C of E (A) Primary School

Following my visit with Fiona Gowers, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2–3 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 – inadequate

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 Diocese of Lichfield and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke on Trent.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Mark's C of E (A) Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 2–3 December 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, staff, parents, governors, a representative from the local authority, an external consultant and visited 17 lessons.

## Context

There have been some significant changes to the school since it was inspected in May 2009. The building work was completed in September 2009. Since September 2009 two newly qualified teachers, one full-time and one part-time, have taken up post. The senior leadership team has been restructured and roles redefined, and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader is now part of this team. Three new governors have joined the governing body.

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

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills below expectations for their age. Assessments of children's performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not sufficiently secure to provide a clear picture of their progress. However, standards in numeracy, reading and writing in Key Stage 1 have remained low and attainment is well below national average at the end of Key Stage 1. In the national tests for English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2009, attainment was well below average. Only two pupils attained Level 5 in English and four in mathematics. Progress for all groups of pupils is inadequate; boys do not do as well as girls. The school has produced a great deal of data, but this has not been analysed. The inclusion leader carefully tracks and monitors all pupils who have English as second language, but cannot delegate some of this work because staff are not sufficiently confident to use the new data recording and pupil tracker systems effectively.

Lesson planning has begun to improve, but it does not always identify sufficient strategies to challenge all pupils effectively. As a result, higher attaining pupils in particular do not always have work matched well enough to ensure they achieve their potential. Teachers' strategies to promote learning through assessment are at an early stage and inconsistent across the school. Not all teachers have been able to make the best use of the support they have been given by the local authority. Pupils say they enjoy school, some lessons are interesting and these help them to learn.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- analysing data more effectively to check on pupils' progress, including the progress of different groups, to enable managers to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes – inadequate

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour in class is good. Some boisterous behaviour is still evident in the playground. Attendance is improving. The school now takes an appropriately firmer stance on absence. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development remains satisfactory. In a Year 3 lesson, pupils responded well to opportunities to share different feelings. Pupils enjoy lessons when they are active participants, for example, during a science lesson where pupils worked effectively in groups to plan and test the factors affecting sugar dissolving. Pupils spend too much time listening passively in lessons. Too often teachers allow boys to dominate when they ask questions. Pupils are not well prepared for their future lives.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching has improved and is broadly satisfactory. Staff work very hard and relationships between staff and pupils are good. There are significant variations in planning and approaches to classroom management. Too often pace slows and time is wasted. There is still inadequate teaching and teachers' expectations are often too low. Staff are not given enough support to improve their practice, and as a result ways of working, which are agreed in meetings, are not implemented effectively.

Teachers use learning objectives and success criteria to plan lessons, but many pupils said that work was too easy. When learning is good, pupils are actively engaged in activities, they are able to set themselves appropriate targets for achievement and work is stimulating.

The quality of teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving and is satisfactory. Children make most progress in the adult led sessions because they are adapted appropriately to meet every child's learning needs. In the child-initiated activities children's progress slows because the purpose of activities is not clear and they are not sufficiently challenging. Systems are in place to assess children's progress, but they are not rigorous enough to provide an accurate picture of children's attainment on entry to Year 1. As a result, staff in Year 1 are not able to plan effectively the learning activities required to meet the full range of pupils' needs.

Teachers' questioning of pupils about their learning is not secure. Frequently, too many questions do not help pupils to explain their thinking. Teachers' marking in books has improved. They make detailed and positive comments on pupils' work, but



do not always provide sufficient opportunities for them to practise the next steps needed to improve. Thus opportunities to consolidate and advance learning are missed.

Teachers talk too much and waste time at the beginning and end of lessons. The pace of many activities is too slow and pupils start to fidget. Teaching assistants are being used more effectively to help pupils to settle to lessons. At times they are inappropriately used to manage learning resources instead of working alongside pupils. Teachers are increasingly better supporting pupils with special educational needs and /or disabilities in group work and better matching activities to their learning needs.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by raising teachers' expectations of all groups of pupils, accelerating the pace of lessons and improving organisation so time is used more effectively – inadequate

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Roles and responsibilities within the senior team are now explicit and clear. Some leaders still have a disproportionate amount of responsibility. The headteacher and senior leadership team work hard, but their actions are not sufficiently promoting teachers' self-confidence and capacity for improvement. The school has had considerable support both prior to going into special measures and since. This has had little impact because its purpose is not clearly understood by all staff and consequently, advice is not consistently implemented. The school has an action plan which clearly states the priorities for improvement, but development activities are not rigorously evaluated and next steps for action are not clearly identified. Monitoring is not sufficiently rigorous and judgments about many aspects of the school's work are still insecure. The senior team does not share effectively its secure view of teaching and learning so that some teachers remain unclear as to what makes a good lesson. The senior team recognises that more needs to be done and the staff questionnaire indicates that staff are very willing and keen to develop and share their practice. Mentoring and support to newly qualified teachers is good.

Parents have begun to see improvements in the school. They like the weekly newsletter and are pleased to see that homework is now set more frequently. Some parents expressed concerns about out of school visits, but the inspection team found that appropriate risk assessments are carried out and staffing numbers are suitable. Safeguarding is secure and all staff are kept up to date with training. All statutory requirements are met.



The school has updated its tracking systems and this has led to a delay in analysing data. The school recognises this and is working to have this securely in place for next term.

The delay and difficulty the school has experienced in recruiting staff has meant that there is still no home school liaison worker. This is hindering the school's plan to develop its work with parents.

Governance remains inadequate. The governors have established a monitoring group to hold the school to account. This is at a very early stage of development and it is too soon to be able to judge the impact. Training is also in hand to ensure that governors understand the school's data and can better hold it to account.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increasing the rigour of monitoring and evaluation of teaching by focusing it clearly on pupils' learning – inadequate

#### External support

The school has received a considerable amount of good quality support from the local authority and the attached headteacher. This has not had the impact expected because it is not being evaluated effectively by the school. The school needs to establish a clear focus for the support and align its monitoring to support this.

The local authority action plan meets the requirements identified by Ofsted.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that teachers plan effectively for every lesson, so that work is better matched to individual pupils' needs, engages all pupils' interest and boosts progress.
- Ensure that all staff understand the features of a good lesson and that support eradicates unsatisfactory teaching and increases the proportion of good lessons across the curriculum.