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12 March 2010

Mrs Claire Davies
Headteacher
St Matthias Church of England Primary School
Cromwell Road
Malvern Link
Worcestershire
WR14 1NA

Dear Mrs Davies

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Matthias Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Declan McCauley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 March 2010, 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 third 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.

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 Diocesan Director of Education for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Matthias Church of England Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 March 2010

Evidence

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

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in November 2009, work has begun on building an extension to the school to provide additional administrative space. A replacement teacher has been employed on a temporary two-term contract to cover a long-term absence. In addition, a teaching assistant and a part-time handyman have also been appointed.

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

Observations of lessons demonstrate that the school's improvement strategies are succeeding at increasing the rate at which pupils learn. Overall, pupils are making more consistent progress in lessons than they were during the last monitoring inspection. This is because teachers are using tracking data more effectively to plan work that builds on pupils' prior learning. As a result, pupils are benefiting from achieving greater success in lessons, which is adding to their enjoyment of school.

Children begin school in the Nursery class with skills often lower than is usual. They are supported well and settle quickly. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress and are on track to be prepared well for the start of Year 1. In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are making faster progress than previously but the rate at which pupils learn varies between classes. Activities are being matched more closely to pupils' abilities but, on some occasions, the work is either too challenging for the less-able pupils or does not stretch the more-able pupils sufficiently. However, greater care is being given to meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities through the provision of carefully organised intervention strategies, including targeted individual support programmes. These are working well and enabling these pupils to learn and make good progress. These improvements have been achieved as a result of the overall better quality of teaching. However, because teachers do not make their expectations explicit enough about the quality or quantity of work required, pupils' attainment in lessons although improving, remains variable. The school's tracking data provides strong evidence of the recent improvements as the current Year 6 cohort are on course to exceed previous cohorts' attainment and reach levels at or above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils show good attitudes to learning in the classroom. They are attentive and listen carefully to instructions. They collaborate well together. The introduction of 'talk partners', where pupils work in pairs to discuss ideas, has encouraged them to engage in class discussions. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils are keen to learn and are considerate to each other. In the best lessons, pupils are busy, active and on task and there is a quiet working environment. On the playground pupils play and behave well. Relationships are good.

Pupils participate well in school assemblies. On entry to the hall they join in enthusiastically with the singing and listen carefully to the topic being discussed. Pupils given responsibilities carry them out sensibly and act as positive role models for younger pupils to emulate.

With the start of building work at the school a temporary entrance has been created, which is working well. The change, brought in last term, for Key Stage 2 pupils to enter classrooms on arrival each morning, has been extended to the rest of the school. This initiative, along with other developments such as contacting parents by text when pupils are absent, has helped to raise attendance levels to 94.5% which, although average when compared to national data, is an improvement on previous figures.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last visit. More good lessons were seen and no inadequate teaching was observed. Teachers' lesson plans are clearer and better quality than previously. However, in many cases the lesson objectives focus on the activity pupils will complete rather than identifying what they will learn.

Tracking pupils' performance has become an integral part of the school's monitoring procedures. Teachers are regularly provided with accurate information about how well pupils are performing. They are becoming increasingly confident at using the assessment data to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, set targets and plan work that builds on their prior learning. This development is also increasing teachers' accountability for pupils' progress.

Lessons are often conducted at a brisk pace with less time spent in discussion and more time devoted to completion of activities. Teachers are growing in confidence when using interactive whiteboards to explain and demonstrate strategies being taught, but they are still not using the equipment to its full potential. Teaching assistants contribute well to the quality of teaching. Their role has been extended to ensure that they work with different groups and not just those needing additional



support and help. Although they often work with the same class, the teachers' lesson plans do not always make clear what is expected of them. Teachers usefully recap what pupils have learned at the end of lessons. However, on some occasions they focus on the activities completed by a particular group, which is not always relevant to other pupils who have been working on other tasks.

Teachers are making good links between subjects to provide opportunities for pupils to practise their skills. Many of the literacy lessons used pupils' educational visits to provide a stimulus and purpose for writing, which engaged pupils well in the planned writing activities.

There is a greater consistency in the quality of marking across the school. Teachers are recording comments that praise effort and also identify how work can be improved, but on a few occasions words are misspelt and punctuation is not always used correctly. Many of the older pupils are responding to teachers' marking, for example, by writing a reply to show that they have read the comments. However, some pupils find it difficult to read the teachers' handwriting because it is not neat enough or the words used are beyond the pupils' comprehension.

Progress since the last visit 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 provide appropriate guidance to pupils on how their work can be improved - satisfactory
- ensure pupils make more progress in lessons by ensuring that pupils spend less time listening and more time actively engaged– satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership team has strengthened its role by creating an appropriate strategy for improvement. Morale across the school is good and there is a strong collaborative approach. The senior leaders have a clear view of what needs to be achieved and have put into place various initiatives that are making a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, the emphasis on raising the quality of teaching and learning is improving the rate at which pupils learn. The regular cycle of monitoring the effectiveness of lessons is embedded and working well. Feedback to teachers on lessons observed is comprehensive and developmental although evidence for the impact of teaching on pupils' progress is not cited to support the judgement. Areas identified for improvement are reviewed in subsequent observations, as part of the process to monitor and evaluate teachers' performance and development.

Governors are continuing to provide good quality support for the school. They receive useful reports from the headteacher and local authority about developments. These reports ensure that they are informed about the progress being achieved against each of the inspection recommendations. Governors are working to provide a greater level of challenge in order to hold the school to account for its work. To



improve their capability they have completed focused training activities and introduced opportunities for staff with specific roles to deliver presentations about their responsibilities and discuss aspects of their subject. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fully in place. Following a site safety assessment they identified a potential hazard to the security of the grounds and acted quickly to resolve the matter. Governors have also identified the need to ensure that all statutory requirements are met and have made plans to ensure that they publish the school profile as a matter of urgency.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress more rigorously; and draw up and implement plans to improve the areas of weakness – good.

External support

The local authority has continued to work closely with the school providing good advice and guidance. Advisers are monitoring the school's progress regularly and providing detailed reports to governors. Individual teachers have been supported well by the authority's educational consultants. Their input has been influential in strengthening the quality of teaching across the school. The local authority's involvement with the school continues to develop and strengthen the leaders' capacity to make further improvements.

Priority for further improvement

- Ensure lesson plans make clear what pupils are expected to learn and include opportunities at the end of lessons to determine what pupils have learned.

