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24 March 2010

Mrs Samantha Cross
St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School
Wood Terrace
Shelton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST1 4LR

Dear Mrs Cross

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

Following my visit with Julie Price Grimshaw and Jennifer Platt, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 22-23 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 second 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection –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 CofE (A) Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22-23 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the deputy head, partner headteacher and senior leadership team, teachers, pupils, parents, governors and representatives from the local authority and diocese.

Context

There have been some significant changes to the school since my last visit in December 2009. The headteacher has been on long term sick leave and the school has been led and managed by the deputy headteacher and the partner headteacher. The senior leadership team has been restructured. Two new governors have joined the governing body. A home-school worker and two additional teaching assistants have been appointed.

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

Pupils' progress in the lessons observed in different classes continues to vary. It was weakest in some areas of Key Stage 1 and strongest at the end of Key Stage 2. The school has collected a large amount of data to determine the National Curriculum level at which each pupil is working and has just begun to analyse this information. Consequently, teachers have not yet made use of assessments in their planning. However, teachers broadly identify the levels pupils are working at and this has helped improve the matching of work to pupils' capabilities. The school has correctly identified the needs of different groups of pupils but is only in the early stages of using this information to raise attainment.

In Early Years Foundation Stage children make broadly satisfactory progress and staff are gaining in confidence in using assessment data to support learning activities better.

Improved assessment of pupils has enabled the school to measure achievement from Key Stage 1 to Year 6 and shows that in Year 6 fourteen pupils have begun to make good progress in reading and nine made good progress in mathematics. A range of interventions are now in place to support those making inadequate progress in all years.

Progress since the last visit on the area 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

In the last two weeks the main playground has been greatly improved by the addition of new play equipment. Pupils in Year 6 have been appointed play leaders and they have responsibility to hand out and collect in the equipment. All pupils now are active and enjoy their play times. Behaviour was carefully managed so that even though space is limited pupils play together well. Teachers have successfully adopted a range of strategies to ensure that questions are asked of all pupils in lessons so boys no longer dominate class discussions.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning across the school is uneven. Whilst some teaching is good, inadequate teaching remains and the quality of teaching overall is still not strong enough to accelerate pupils' progress and drive up standards. It is weakest in some areas of Key Stage 1 and the best practice was seen at the end of Key Stage 2. Teachers are using strategies they have been recently trained in, but the effectiveness varies according to their understanding. For example, the good idea of beginning every day with an activity to get pupils thinking is not fully exploited as the opportunity is missed to clearly link it to the first lesson of the morning. Similarly, teachers now organise 'talking partners' to help pupils to explain their thinking before they answer the teacher's question. But this activity is allowed to last for too long. Consequently the pace of learning slows and pupils begin to fidget. Too much time is wasted by teachers expecting pupils to write out learning objectives, many of which are not understood by pupils. In addition, many learning objectives are not appropriate to the learning. Sometimes teachers still talk for too long, which continues to slow learning and pupils are given too few opportunities to explain their ideas. In some classes the grouping of pupils did not enable them to work together which often left one pupil working alone. Parents are rightly concerned about inadequate teaching.

In the best lessons, teachers communicate clearly what they want pupils to learn and ensure that carefully planned steps enable pupils to develop their understanding. Tasks are carefully matched to pupils' capabilities and interests so they are stretching and stimulating. The pace of learning is rapid because teachers have appropriately high expectations and the pupils happily rise to the challenges presented. In these classes teaching assistants are well deployed and enable pupils to remain on task. In the case of some pupils, who are in the early stages of learning English, they ensure pupils understand the work and succeed in challenging tasks. However, there is as yet not enough of this good quality teaching to secure the required improvements in pupils' achievement.

Progress since the last inspection on the area 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.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The morale of staff and ethos of the school have improved dramatically over the last four weeks under the care of the deputy headteacher and partner headteacher. Whilst the new leadership team has not had long enough to demonstrate the impact of their work on pupils' learning, there is now a 'can do ethos' and staff confidence has considerably improved. The senior leadership team are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have begun to draw up a plan of action to address weaknesses. Priorities include developing teachers' planning to ensure it better supports pupils' learning and uses the school's data on achievement to target support to pupils who are not making expected progress. The senior team is keenly aware of weaknesses in teaching and has plans in hand to improve it through sharing the growing amount of good practice and the deployment of external support. The senior team has regard for the fact that in the past much impact of support provided to staff was lost because the school did not effectively coordinate and evaluate it.

The senior leadership team accompanied the inspection team on joint lesson observations and the school's view matched inspectors'. The senior team share a clear view of what constitutes good learning and have a monitoring schedule ready for next term, which they have not yet had time to implement.

Parents are understandably very concerned about the quality of leadership and management of the school. The senior leadership team are aware that communication with parents is still an area of weakness and plans are in hand to work with the governing body to improve it.

Governance is now satisfactory. Through the monitoring groups that were established last term, governors identified that provision of information technology was inadequate. White boards do not work, or are not used properly, some laptops are broken and provision of computers in classrooms is poor. Plans are in place to remedy these shortcomings for the summer term. The governors now more confidently hold the school to account.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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



External support

The school has continued to receive a considerable amount of good quality support from the local authority but its impact has been reduced because of the inadequate capacity of the school to manage and evaluate it. Consequently, staff development has been very piecemeal.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve communication with parents to ensure they are fully informed of their children's education and work alongside them as partners in their children's learning.