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22 March 2010

Mrs S Magill
St John Church of England Primary School, Kearsley
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Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Magill

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John Church of England Primary School, Kearsley

Following my visit with Naila Zaffar, additional inspector, to your school on 18 – 19 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 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 the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and the Director of Children's Services for Bolton and Manchester Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St John Church of England Primary School, Kearsley

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 - 19 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including parts of 12 lessons, scrutinised pupils' work and documents, and met with the headteacher, members of teaching staff, groups of pupils, the chair and two members of the IEB, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

The governing body has been replaced with an IEB, which was appointed in December 2009. One teacher has been on long term absence due to sickness since November 2009. The class is currently being taught by the deputy headteacher and a part-time teacher.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to the school, which is a friendly, caring community. They display positive attitudes to their work, applying themselves diligently. Good relationships between teachers and other adults and pupils contribute to the sense of security that pupils experience, which is helping to improve confidence and self-esteem and to raise expectations. In the large majority of the lessons observed pupils made satisfactory progress overall, although there were examples of individuals and groups making better progress. However, learning and progress are not yet rapid enough to counteract the legacy of underachievement fully. Standards are not yet high enough. There is a strong focus on developing literacy skills, which was especially evident in the volume of work produced by pupils in Year 6. This is helping to raise standards in writing but there is still some way to go.

Much work has been done to ensure that teacher assessments are accurate through moderation within the school, with the partner school and with local authority officers, but differences in pupils' performance on individual tasks and in practice test situations have contributed to a lack of clarity about precise levels of attainment. Current school assessment data indicate that more pupils are working at or close to the level expected for their age, but significant pockets of underachievement and low attainment remain, especially where pupils have experienced discontinuities in teaching. Underachievement is most evident in upper Key Stage 2. Standards in Year 5 are particularly low and further intervention strategies are planned to address this.

School data and observations show that the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving, but it is not yet fast enough to



make up for gaps in previous learning. Most pupils continue to be taught with the rest of their class, but with additional support from teaching assistants or the class teacher. Teaching assistants have benefited from additional training which is helping them to provide more effective support, but there are times during lessons when they are not used effectively. The school's approach is inclusive but for some pupils it does not make the best use of learning time, especially when they have to listen to the teacher explaining work at a level higher than they can realistically tackle. Examples of the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) packages to support individual pupils were observed in lessons. Pupils value the opportunity to share their achievements through presentations at their annual reviews.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment in all subjects, particularly in writing, to be in line with the national average, through raising the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that:
 - lessons take full account of pupils' interests, skills and National Curriculum levels
 - pupils extend their writing skills in all curriculum areas
 - pupils extend and develop their ICT skills across the curriculum and use it to extend their learning
 - governors fulfil their roles in monitoring and assessing the impact of initiatives
 - the gap between boys' and girls' attainment is further reduced.

- satisfactory progress.

- Raise attainment for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - providing daily targeted support
 - monitoring the impact of support programmes
 - providing challenging activities which meet their needs and interests.

- satisfactory progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils generally are polite and sensible. In lessons they settle readily to work and they know how to behave well. Impeccable behaviour was observed during a whole school assembly and pupils' pleasure at receiving awards, such as the 'superlearners' award', was obvious. Attendance is improving, reflecting pupils' increasing enjoyment of their learning, although for a very few pupils frequent absences hinder progress. The high uptake of school meals and pupils' enjoyment of their physical



education lessons and extra-curricular clubs are contributing well to pupils leading healthy lifestyles.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching was at least satisfactory in all the lessons observed and in a few lessons good teaching was seen. Behaviour is generally managed effectively and classrooms provide an environment conducive to learning, with good relevant displays including pupils' work. Relationships are good and teachers are lively, enthusiastic and encouraging. However, there is not yet enough good teaching to ensure that all pupils make the rapid progress that is needed to tackle historic underachievement. A common planning format has been agreed but inspectors found variation in the quality of teachers' planning, with some much more comprehensive than others. Teachers are beginning to make better use of knowledge of pupils' current levels of attainment in their planning. However, while some teachers do plan different tasks and activities for pupils of different abilities this is not sufficiently refined and often differentiation is largely by outcome. Teachers do evaluate pupils' learning in lessons on a day-by-day basis but their skill in doing so and in applying this knowledge varies. They are not always adept at adapting their teaching in response to pupils' needs.

The level of challenge in the work set for pupils is improving especially in literacy. In upper Key Stage 2 literacy lessons, teachers are careful in their teacher-led introductory sessions to explain exactly what is required, with some good involvement of pupils in question and answer sessions. This helps to check understanding and reinforce learning. Checklists and reminders about individual targets are also used well at times. In other lessons, expectations are not always as explicit. A feature of many satisfactory lessons is too much whole-class teaching with much time spent listening to the teacher before pupils are more actively involved in learning or applying their skills to specific tasks. Teaching assistants are often not used effectively at such times so that valuable learning time and a valuable resource are not made best use of.

Pupils' progress is formally assessed at regular intervals and tracked. Much work has been done to ensure the accuracy of teachers' levelling of work. Detailed feedback is given to older pupils on longer pieces of written work, which is helpful. Marking in books varies in rigour, with some including effective constructive feedback. Teachers' skills in assessing the small steps in pupils' progress during lessons vary. Pupils who are having difficulty are sometimes not noticed for some time, while those who have grasped something are not always given more challenging work. Targets in Key Stage 2 are set on the basis of pupils making two full levels of progress. The way pupils' progress towards these is tracked does not make it immediately apparent how many are working at age-related expectations, although this information is available separately.



Pupils' positive views of the school provide evidence of the curriculum engaging their interest better. There are good examples of learning being contextualised to make it more relevant to their day-to-day lives. For example, before tackling a task to write a letter persuading parents of the benefits of school meals, Year 5 pupils had the opportunity to listen to the school cook talking about healthy eating. This helped to generate enthusiasm for the task as well as providing relevant information. Some use has also been made of visits to places of interest such as the local museum as well as visitors to the school. The use of ICT is developing and most classes now use the ICT suite more than once a week. There are some opportunities for pupils to develop literacy skills through other subjects, such as history and personal, health and social education, but few of these involve extended pieces of writing. In some subjects there is a heavy reliance on worksheets. Homework challenges, which engage interest and enthusiasm, are helping extend learning beyond the classroom.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the future and works with relentless energy to move the school forward. The action plan is appropriately focused on the priorities identified at the last inspection with timescales, responsibilities and monitoring arrangements included. Staff morale is good. There is collaborative teamwork and a genuine commitment to raising achievement. The quality of teaching is monitored through observations, learning walks and book scrutiny. Differentiated support arrangements are put in place for teachers where weaknesses are identified. Leadership of different aspects of the school's work is improving. In literacy, for example, much work has gone into planning the teaching of specific skills to make up lost ground. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also improving. However, the absence of the assessment coordinator has placed an additional burden on the headteacher and deputy headteacher. There is a need to prioritise the demands made on their time to ensure that the most important tasks are tackled promptly.

While data are collected about pupils' attainment and progress, they are collated in different formats, which has led to some lack of clarity and precision. The use of different types of assessment, including optional tests and teacher assessment of class work, has sometimes given different pictures of attainment and progress. Nevertheless, all the evidence points to an improving pattern of progress, albeit one that is not yet rapid enough.

An IEB was formed in December 2009 and has met several times since January 2010. It includes several highly-experienced education professionals as well as the Chair and Vice Chair of the former Governing Body. Since its inception, the IEB has provided very clear strategic direction and support to the school. The involvement of professionals who are supporting the school directly ensures that the IEB has a good understanding of the position of the school. Members of the IEB are therefore well



placed to ask challenging questions and ensure that the implementation of improvement plans is carefully monitored and evaluated.

External support

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements and provides a clear framework for school improvement with interim milestones. A substantial array of valuable support measures is in place, much of this following on from the local authority's support prior to the school being made the subject of special measures. Local authority advisers and consultants have worked with the school on a range of issues including data analysis, support for subject leaders, moderation of teacher assessments, teacher assistant training, and support for classroom teachers. A link with another school through Greater Manchester Challenge has provided valuable focused opportunities for the professional development of teachers and teaching assistants, as well as leadership coaching. Teachers, for example, have had the opportunity to observe good practice in the partner school. Work to develop Early Years Foundation Stage provision is another feature of this support.

The local authority review of the school in February 2010 provided a clear analysis of the progress the school was making and highlighted those aspects that remain significant weaknesses. The school has responded positively to many aspects of the external support provided, but there is now a recognition both by leaders within the school and by support partners that the school needs to become more self-sufficient in driving improvement from within.

Priorities for further improvement

- Refine teaching and learning strategies in planning and in lessons to ensure that work and activities are appropriately challenging for all groups of pupils and individuals to increase rates of progress.
- Develop a clearer and sharper leadership and management focus on driving improvement from within the school, with more proactive short and longer term planning centred around the most important priorities.