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8 July 2010

Mrs Quick  
Headteacher  
Wood Terrace  
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Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST1 4LR

Dear Mrs Quick

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

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 July 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 May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good  
Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 Governing Body 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 third monitoring inspection on 6–7 July 2010

## Evidence

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

## Context

Since the previous visit in March 2010, the headteacher has resigned and the deputy headteacher and executive headteacher have been leading the school. A new headteacher has been appointed and will join the school in September 2010 together with two assistant headteachers and a new class teacher. One teacher is currently on maternity leave.

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains low but is improving. Test results at the end of Year 6 have improved dramatically from those of previous years. In mathematics in 2009, 51% of pupils attained Level 4 and above and 10% Level 5, this year 72% attained Level 4 and above and 28% Level 5. In English in 2009, 55% attained Level 4 and above and 5% Level 5, this year 68% attained Level 4 and above and 23% Level 5. The school's data show that Year 5 pupils are on track to reach their targets. This is because the tracking of pupils' progress has improved and the information is now used more effectively to support pupils' progress. Lesson observations showed that the majority of pupils now make satisfactory progress. However, some pupils recently arrived in England and in the early stages of learning English do not make sufficient progress. Also, some high attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently once they have attained their age-related targets.

At the end of Key Stage 1 teachers' assessment of pupils is now more secure and builds well upon the work of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 – good

## Other relevant pupil outcomes

The impact of the new play equipment has greatly improved the quality of pupils' playtimes and lunch breaks. They now have goals for football, basketball hoops and cricket equipment. The youngest children in Early Years Foundation Stage now play separately, so that they are no longer affected by the more boisterous play of older pupils. Playtimes are organised well by older pupils and pupils enjoy the wide range of activities provided. Behaviour in the afternoon sessions has greatly improved because of this and pupils quickly settle to their work. The school has begun to organise enrichment activities. For example, during the inspector's visit, pupils were able to participate in cycling proficiency awareness and a cricket match against parents and carers, staff and governors. Both these activities were a great success in building pupils' skills in participating in activities with adults. In addition, assemblies are carefully planned and parents and carers are invited to attend when they are led by pupils. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now 93%. It has correctly identified some groups of pupils who are persistently absent and it has begun to look at strategies to boost their attendance.

## The effectiveness of provision

Unevenness in the quality of teaching and learning has been tackled effectively so that the majority of lessons are now good. Teachers are far more confident in their teaching and are using the strategies they have learnt in their training. Questions now probe pupils' understanding of their work and they are encouraged to explain their reasoning. Teachers now mark work more consistently and pupils understand what they have done well and what they need to improve. Pupils' work, such as drafting, shows evidence of self correction. Pupils practise things they have previously found difficult and so improve their work.

Teachers' planning appropriately takes account of assessment information and so activities are more challenging and more closely tailored to individual pupil's needs. In the best planning, work was carefully matched to pupils' needs and the national curriculum levels they were working towards were also shown. Whilst the majority of teachers are still not sufficiently challenging high attaining pupils, some teachers have begun to plan work which strengthens pupils' reasoning. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils were asked to complete a number grid, which only had a few squares filled in and they used these cues to calculate successfully the values for every square. A small number of newly arrived pupils, who are in the early stages of learning English, are not stimulated adequately by the work they are given, partly because some teachers seem unclear about whether these pupils have special learning needs or whether it is their lack of English that is limiting their understanding. In addition, some of these pupils have considerable periods of absence from school and this hampers their progress.

Learning objectives are now more closely matched to the learning activities and pupils are no longer wasting time writing them down. Success criteria are shared with pupils so they are clear about what is expected of them. The school is aware that some pupils have difficulty seeing interactive white boards because space is limited in classrooms and often the light is too bright to see the screens clearly. Teachers are beginning to use technology to support learning with greater confidence and, as a result, pupils are better able to learn independently and enjoy their work. The pace of learning has improved.

Teaching assistants are beginning to use the training they have had in supporting pupils in the early stages of learning English. The school has not yet had time to monitor the impact of this.

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 – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The rigour and energy of the executive headteacher, together with the deputy headteacher, has begun to empower the staff. As a result, all staff now have a 'can do' attitude and have a new confidence in their own abilities. The ethos of the school has improved and both staff and pupils are happy. This was commented upon by parents and carers. The senior team are now more rigorous in their monitoring of teaching and learning and are beginning to hold teachers to account effectively. However, middle managers are not monitoring teachers' use of assessment information, teaching and learning nor pupils' progress. This limits the capacity of the school to improve further.

The school has worked hard and successfully to improve communication with parents and carers. Parents and carers now receive a regular newsletter and there are weekly drop in sessions with the executive headteacher. Most were overwhelmingly positive about the improvements in communications and recognised the improvements in their child's education. One parent said that the school was now more approachable, working in partnership with parents and carers well and more forthcoming about their child's progress. A minority of parents and carers said the school still did not respond to their concerns soon enough and felt that there were too few opportunities for enriching their child's education, for example, with trips and in use of the local area, such as the nearby park and the school grounds.

Governance remains satisfactory. Governors are beginning to help improve the quality of education offered by the school evidenced for example by their rapid response to improve information and communication technology in the classrooms.

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 – satisfactory

External support

The impact of the good quality support from the local authority can now be seen in the improvements the school has made. The school has now begun to manage its support needs and be strategic in assessing its own needs. Consequently, the level of support from the local authority needs to be scaled down to ensure that school strengthens its confidence in its own capacity for improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that middle managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment information by teachers to plan activities so that all pupils have work more closely tailored to their needs, but particularly those in the early stages of learning English to accelerate their progress.