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Monday 19 July 2010

Mr Lawrence Gittins  
St John's CofE Primary School  
Blakebrook  
Kidderminster  
Worcestershire  
DY11 6AP

Dear Mr Gittins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John's CofE Primary School

Following my visit with Declan McCauley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 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 – satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

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 Worcestershire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St John's Church of England Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 July 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team and other members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, and individual and groups of pupils.

## Context

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2010, the recently appointed substantive headteacher began work at the start of the summer term. The seconded assistant headteacher has been appointed as a permanent member of staff. Four teaching members of staff leave at the end of the summer term. One teacher, currently absent on maternity leave, is returning for the start of the autumn term, on a part-time basis. One of the full-time teachers will return in September, as a part-time member of staff before taking maternity leave. Two teachers are currently away on long-term absence, although one is returning to work after the summer holiday. A new teacher has been appointed on a year's fixed-term contract, beginning in September. A school bursar is being appointed ready to begin in September, taking responsibility for finance and the office management.

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

In the majority of lessons observed pupils make broadly satisfactory progress. Teachers are better informed about pupils' level of attainment. They often work together in pairs to plan lessons for parallel classes of similarly-aged pupils. This is a positive development that helps pupils in some parallel classes make similar progress during each lesson. In those year groups where pupils in parallel classes do not make the same progress, it is partly because teachers do not expect enough from all the pupils, particularly the more-able. Similarly, there are disparities between the rates at which other groups, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those in receipt of free school meals and boys and girls, make progress. As a result, pupils are not making enough good progress, across the school, to accelerate their rate of learning and so raise standards. Consequently, the standards pupils are attaining have not improved on the previous years' results. In particular, the standards attained by the more-able pupils have fallen slightly, particularly so for Year 2 pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate progress in all subjects to improve standards across the school— inadequate.



## Other relevant pupil outcomes

As on previous visits, there is a positive working atmosphere in most lessons and pupils apply themselves diligently to the task in hand. In a few lessons, teachers' acceptance of some low level disruption has a negative impact on the pace of learning and this reduces the lesson's effectiveness.

Pupils' behaviour during break and lunch periods is good overall. The additional space presented by the use of the field over the summer months provides the pupils with enough room to play a variety of games without getting in each others' way. As a result, they often play together well. Supervision levels are good and pupils are confident that they can confide in the adults at school.

Attendance levels of 94.8% for the year-to-date are average. While this figure has remained constant for much of the year, it is an improvement on the previous year's level. As a result of the school's efforts to reduce the level of persistent absenteeism, the number of pupils falling into this category this year has more than halved.

## The effectiveness of provision

The quality of lessons seen during the monitoring visit varied quite considerably. The quality of most lessons is satisfactory, but there is a range with a small minority being outstanding and a very few being inadequate. The quality of teaching is much stronger in some year groups than others. There are also differences in the quality of lessons taught in some parallel classes, despite the shared planning that often takes place beforehand. The inconsistent quality of teaching observed across the school is partly due to the numerous changes of staff that have occurred. In those year groups where staff are used to working together, the lessons are organised well and meet the needs of most pupils. Teachers use assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' understanding and plan lessons that provide the appropriate next steps in learning. They also match work to take account of pupils' differing needs but opportunities are sometimes missed to fully challenge all groups, particularly the more-able. The most effective lessons motivate pupils and build upon their interests. Teachers' expectations of behaviour are high and pupils respond well to the clear boundaries that are set. Teaching assistants are deployed well and given clear guidance as to their role supporting learning.

In the least successful lessons teachers' expectations are not high enough and the pace of learning is too slow. Too much time is spent consolidating pupils' knowledge and understanding, rather than extending their learning. As a consequence, some pupils do not pay full attention, become disinterested and take the opportunity to disengage from the lesson.



Teachers' marking of pupils' work is continuing to develop well. Greater care is being taken to ensure that comments are written clearly and help pupils to understand how their work could be improved.

Teachers are enhancing the content of the school's curriculum to ensure that pupils are interested and enthused about learning but, they do not always take sufficient account of all groups and provide enough challenge. The development of the Forest school on site provides younger pupils with an exciting resource to learn first-hand about the outdoor environment. Pupils also benefit from the many visits they make to local places of interest that link to their school work and provide opportunities to extend their learning. Further work is planned to begin in the autumn extending the thematic approach across the school and ensure that it better meets the needs of all pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching by raising teachers' expectations, increasing the pace of learning and the level of challenge for all pupils – satisfactory
- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and builds effectively on what pupils have done so that progress is accelerated – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A significant number of changes have taken place since the previous monitoring visit. The newly appointed headteacher has very quickly acquired a very clear understanding of the school's current position and implemented a focused plan for change. Working together, the senior leadership team have created a new staffing structure ready for September and reorganised the subject leadership roles. The introduction of four phase leaders, who each have responsibility for designated year groups, provides a clear system of accountability for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and attainment. Plans are in hand to ensure that subject leaders also take on increased levels of responsibility. Good account has been taken of the numerous staffing changes taking place to ensure that individuals are clear about their new roles and responsibilities. Staff morale remains strong and positive.

Monitoring procedures include frequent observations of teaching and closer scrutiny of pupils' learning. The majority of lesson observations are carried out by the headteacher, but there are clear plans to ensure that all the school leaders share responsibility for improving the quality of teaching. While the observations of lessons are accurate in judging the quality of teaching they do not focus sufficiently on assessing pupils' progress, particularly that of specific groups.

Recent improvements to the school include the refurbished hall with its new floor and better storage facilities and the installation of a managed wireless network in preparation for the reorganisation of computers into classrooms.



The governing body is providing better support for the school, than was previously the case. They are receiving detailed information from the headteacher about the progress being achieved against each of the improvement priorities. This is proving increasingly useful as they develop their skills and confidence at holding the school to account. Working closely with the headteacher and the senior leaders they have begun to address the issue of working with a small deficit budget. The implication of their actions taken over staffing predicts that the size of the deficit will reduce over the next two years. With all the recent changes that have taken place the governing body has not yet managed to publish the school profile. As a result, it is not complying fully with its statutory responsibilities. It also needs to ensure that the school is complying fully with its statutory duty to promote community cohesion. In addition, it must carry out a full risk assessment for managing pedestrian access to the school site from the main road and ensure that the school pond does not present a safety hazard.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership, including monitoring and evaluation, at all levels so that there is a clear basis for planning improvements and effective strategies to ensure they are implemented – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide high quality support for the school. Its own assessment of the school's progress is accurate and the report's commentary is insightful. The advisers have built up the school leaders' capability to take on increasing responsibility for making further improvements. They are continuing to provide strong support for individual and groups of teachers while the school continues to develop the capacity to take on more of this role itself. Indeed, a few teachers have been identified by the local authority as being strong models of good practice and have had their names added to the authority's team of leading practitioners.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use lesson observations to determine the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, particularly the more-able.
- Ensure that the school complies fully with its statutory responsibilities by publishing the school profile each academic year.
- Ensure that the governing body fulfils its statutory requirements to promote community cohesion.
- Carry out relevant risk assessments to ensure that pupils are safe on the school site.

