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Friday 16 July 2010

Mrs Hilary Pritchard
St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School
Stoney Lane
Kidderminster
DY10 2LX

Dear Mrs Pritchard

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 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 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 governors, the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire and the Director of Education for the Worcester Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on Wednesday 14 July 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, and observed eight lessons, scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and school documents. He met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and the subject leaders for literacy and numeracy. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, pupils, parents, a representative of the local authority and the school's welfare officer. Procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were checked and found to be in order.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit there have been no changes in staff. Pupil numbers have changed slightly, with nine leaving and six joining the school.

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

Results in the 2010 national tests taken by Year 6 pupils in English and mathematics show that attainment remains well below the national average. However, the numbers reaching the standards expected nationally in both subjects has increased from 7% in 2009 to 50% in 2010. The detailed tracking system that the school has put into place over the past year shows that attainment in Years 4 and 5 remains well below average, but in the year groups below that the pupils are making better progress and demonstrating higher attainment. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the children make good progress. In Key Stage 1 progress is satisfactory and improving and although the challenges are greater in Key Stage 2, mainly because of the disrupted education they received in the past, pupils' progress is also improving. Achievement is satisfactory and improving: in some classes it is now good. Teachers' expectations are higher than at the start of the year and lessons are now providing a greater degree of challenge. Teaching throughout the school is now good, which is starting to impact on rising achievement. Because they now have effective data on the progress of their pupils, teachers are now able to pitch work at the right level and lesson observations showed clearly differentiated tasks for pupils across the ability range. There are still significant weaknesses in literacy and numeracy skills, and reading remains a key challenge. Steps, such as the acquisition of a new reading scheme, which is aimed in part at enhancing reading standards among the boys, and cross-curricular activities are supporting basic skills enhancement in literacy and numeracy.

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils, especially those at the top of the school, can still be challenging. However, because teaching is good and pupils are engaged in learning, supported by a strong and consistently applied behaviour policy, pupils are generally able to learn effectively in lessons and behaviour around the school is



satisfactory and often good. The school continues to work hard to improve attendance. However, it remains low by national standards and this remains as work in progress. When the school was placed in special measures attendance stood at 88%; by the time of the second monitoring visit it had increased to 90.9% and now, at the end of the school year, it stands at 92%, which was the target set for the year. The challenge remains to sustain this improvement and a range of initiatives to increase parental involvement and to emphasise the importance of regular attendance have been introduced. Parents spoken to said that opportunities for them to be involved in school had been transformed over the year. There is also very effective liaison with the welfare service and procedures in place mean that absence is followed up from the first day, but this remains a key area for further development.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve standards and achievement by the end of Year 6 by ensuring that teachers expect more of the pupils and plan work that is pitched at the right level for them all – satisfactory.
- Improve attendance by working more effectively with parents and pupils – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is now good throughout the school. Every teacher was observed during the monitoring visit and the improvements noted during the two previous monitoring visits, and also in the local authority reviews, have been sustained. Classrooms are visually dynamic, and the school is a stimulating and effective learning environment. Teachers have created Learning Walls since the last monitoring visit to take this process of visual stimulation even further. Teachers have been involved in learning walks around the school, which is supporting consistency of practice and stimulating professional discussion. The inconsistency in marking that was picked up at the last monitoring visit has been addressed. The quality of marking is now very good and the new policy is now being used consistently well. At its best, such as in Year 3, it provides pupils with very clear advice for their next steps. However, what is not yet in place is a time when pupils can make corrections, extend their work or reinforce areas identified by teachers' marking.

Curriculum developments, such as the promotion of opportunities for cross-curricular links, continue under the effective leadership of the deputy headteacher. Events such as 'Do Something Different' provide activity workshops in which pupils get chance to try something new on three mornings a term. Support has come from governors, community members and parents, and this is providing another initiative to draw parents into the life of the school and promote community cohesion.

Feedback from pupils included: 'I've learned how much stuff we get done if we work



together ' and 'I've really enjoyed watching the vegetables grow.' A teaching assistant who participated commented, 'I now feel more confident in how I approach the older children.' As more opportunities for cross-curricular and thematic work have been introduced, work on curriculum mapping to ensure that full National Curriculum coverage has started but has not yet been fully developed.

Care, guidance and support are good and the needs of individual pupils are well known and taken into account. This is an inclusive school and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who form a far higher than average percentage of the total school population, and those from potentially vulnerable backgrounds, receive very effective support. Since the last monitoring visit, a new process for behaviour mapping has been introduced with excellent support from the educational psychologist. Early evidence shows this is having a strong impact on helping pupils who need support with their behaviour because they are being helped to think much more about their behaviour and its impact.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that the curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is responsive to their needs and includes sufficient opportunities for them to practice and improve basic skills in literacy and numeracy by using them in different subjects – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The senior leadership team was completed with the arrival of the deputy headteacher in January 2010 and its positive impact is now felt throughout the school. Many of the parents spoken to were full of praise, especially for the headteacher. She has certainly started the transformation of teaching and learning in order to address the profound weaknesses that led to the school being placed in special measures a year ago. Clear improvement planning is now firmly underpinned by effective data and a vision for enhancing the education of the pupils. This has helped transform staff morale and is providing teachers with the tools to enable them to do their jobs more effectively. However, the senior leadership team has not yet started to set aside quality time to meet during the term to strategically plan and review. Similarly, the role of leaders below the headteacher, including the skilled and effective subject coordinators for English and mathematics, have not been fully utilised for monitoring, observation and promoting effective performance management.

The senior leadership team has created much more effective systems for obtaining, monitoring and sharing data on individual pupils, and this is central to the rising achievement that is now apparent through the school. However, this data is not yet used to underpin the process of self-evaluation and the completion of the school's self-evaluation form, which remains an important area to address.



Governance has improved, in part as a consequence of effective support for training from the local authority, and is satisfactory. The governing body has been restructured with more effective committees and clear terms of reference, while expertise in data analysis is supporting a more effective challenge to the school on its performance than was previously the case.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels make better use of information about how well pupils are doing in Years 3 to 6 to identify and tackle underachievement as soon as it arises – good.

External support

Throughout the last year the local authority has provided effective and appropriate support. This has included carrying out three termly reviews. At the centre of this provision has been the school improvement partner, who has worked closely with the senior leadership team throughout the year and who has a detailed knowledge of the school. In recent times there has been a change of emphasis in the nature of provision. The local authority has determined that the school has made enough progress for it to be in a good position to analyse its own needs and to request support as needed and appropriate. It then continues to meet these needs. For example, when the school felt that its own literacy and numeracy coordinators could be as effective as the external support being provided, the local authority was happy to withdraw its central staff. This shows confidence that the improvements visible in the school are robust enough to stand unsupported, and this has indeed been the case. However, there is still support available when it is needed, such as in the continuing time from the Improving Schools Programme officer. This careful balance between support and allowing the school to take responsibility for itself has been successful because there has been a good partnership and the local authority has an effective understanding of the strengths and the continuing areas for improvement of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Extend the assessment policy to provide time for pupils to undertake revisions, corrections and additions to their work after it has been marked.
- Further develop behaviour mapping so that its use and effectiveness is maximised by all teachers, and outcomes monitored by the appropriate member of the senior leadership team.
- Develop the roles of the senior leadership team and core subject coordinators to promote and develop effective strategic management.



- Complete an up-to-date self-evaluation report that is shared with staff and approved by the governing body.

