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26 November 2010

Miss Sally Magill,
Headteacher
St John CE Primary School, Kearsley
Church Road
Bolton
Greater Manchester
BL4 8AP

Dear Miss Magill

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John C of E Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 Interim Executive Board, the Diocese and Director of Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2009.

Progress since the last monitoring 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:
 - 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 information and communication technology 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.

- 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.

Special measures: monitoring of St John C of E Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2010

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work, eight full and two part lessons; scrutinised documents, such as the school action plan, safeguarding information, minutes of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and local authority reviews; spoke with pupils and the Chair of the IEB and two representatives of the local authority.

Context

Since the second monitoring inspection a new teacher has been appointed to the role of Year 5 teacher with additional responsibility to lead developments in information and communication technology (ICT). There has been a clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all levels of leaders. One member of staff has left the school and the headteacher has taken over responsibility for assessment. The teachers in Reception and Year 1 have swapped year groups.

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

Provisional results at the end of Year 6 for English and mathematics show a much improved and very positive picture compared to those at the time of the inspection. Overall attainment has improved from well-below national expectations in 2009 to above average in 2010. Results in writing show that 80% of pupils reached the expected Level 4 in writing with 20% reaching the higher Level 5. These results are the best the school has achieved for five years. Progress for these pupils across Key Stage 2 was above that expected for similar pupils in similar schools. The gap between boys and girls has substantially narrowed. Boys and girls made similar progress, although boys had a slight edge on the girls. Teacher assessments in science show that 90% of the pupils reached the expected level for their age and almost half reached the higher Level 5. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities on 'school action plus' support made better progress than the similar group in 2009. In the current Year 6 class, the attainment of pupils, who started the year with generally low academic standards, is now rising due to the pupils making improved progress as previous gaps in their learning are tackled.

Results of the 2010 Key Stage 1 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics show that attainment at the end of this stage is broadly similar to that in 2009. However, attainment in writing dropped to below that expected for pupils of a similar age. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities reached academic standards that were significantly below their classmates. However, senior leaders identified the reasons for the drop in writing and the attainment of pupils

with special educational needs and/or disabilities and have introduced action to support these pupils in accelerating their progress as they move through Key Stage 2. This includes a strong focus on early intervention when pupils are in danger of underachieving.

The school has a clear focus on improving pupils' attainment so that they reach age-related expectations and this is starting to pay dividends by the end of Year 6. Senior leaders are aware that, to raise attainment further for all groups of pupils, there is a need to expand that focus so that more-able pupils, who are capable of reaching the higher levels, do so.

Progress since the last section 5 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 – good
- Raise attainment for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils behave well, are polite and courteous. For example, during the visit one pupil offered to take HMI to the correct classroom. Pupils enjoy their lessons; one boy commented, 'You don't mind getting up in the morning because you look forward to school'. Several pupils remarked on their work being mainly, 'not too easy, not too hard'. They appreciate the change in the curriculum expressing how they study more subjects which link together. While appreciating the many visitors who enhance their understanding in different subjects, a few expressed the wish to have more visits. Year 6 pupils talked excitedly of the enterprise project which includes selling items at the Christmas Fayre. Pupils say they feel safe and trust adults to sort out anything that is troubling them. Pupils want to learn, please their teachers, behave well and are willing to persevere at tasks.

The effectiveness of provision

Since September the school has enjoyed a stable staffing complement which has contributed to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. From HMI lesson observations, there was a higher proportion of good rather than satisfactory teaching. There was no inadequate teaching seen. A strong feature of all teaching was the very brisk start to lessons. For example, in a Year 5 lesson on design technology pupils rapidly settled to recording 'praise' and 'find faults' as to whether a displayed piece of material would be suitable as an appliqué on an item of clothing. Pupils were enthused by the task which challenged them to use skills of analysis together with an opportunity to express their opinion and justify it. As a result, pupils were quickly engaged in thinking and learning, leading to rapid progress. This was particularly impressive as the lesson was immediately after the lunch break. This

strong feature is as a result of the school's concerted efforts to improve practice in this part of the lesson. Staff received professional training on this aspect, implemented the strategy and this has led to increased progress for pupils. There were examples of teachers using techniques for checking pupils' progress over the course of a lesson by using probing questions, timed activities, and 'peer assessment'. However, there is an opportunity for teachers to develop a wider repertoire of these skills and for the practice to become embedded to support consistent, accelerated progress. Good relationships and attractive learning environments, mentioned at the last visit, have been maintained and the use of the common format for planning is more consistent.

The use of 'must, could and should' steps as success criteria are shared with pupils and used effectively across the school. Targets are used in all classes but there is a lack of a common method as the school is reviewing the process of how to use targets which will be most appropriate to each age group. Similarly, marking affirms pupils' efforts and there are individual examples where teachers have identified and communicated to pupils how to improve their work further. There was an isolated example of pupils responding to these comments. The school has an opportunity to link its development work on target-setting, marking, setting appropriate 'next steps' and listening to pupils' response to these comments to accelerate pupils' progress further and raise attainment.

Using the National Curriculum as a basis, the school has revised its curriculum over the last few months. Using professional development time, the deputy headteacher, jointly with a middle leader and on the advice of an external consultant led all staff through the process of identifying learning topics which would match the interests of all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers added the skills pupils would develop and the knowledge they would acquire in all subjects, with a particular emphasis in the development of writing. Pupils' work shows that this initiative is starting to improve the opportunities pupils have to write in different contexts. However, the ineffective use of photocopied worksheets can decrease pupils' chances to write at length. This new curriculum started in September and planned activities are interesting and generally engage pupils. While teachers and pupils are enthusiastic about this development, it is too early to evaluate the effect on raising pupils' attainment.

Improvement identified at the last visit in developing pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum has been maintained and enhanced with pupils receiving two dedicated weekly sessions in the ICT suite. Pupils enjoy this work and eagerly engage with the variety of software packages. The appointment of a leader for ICT is a very positive step in taking this aspect of pupils' learning forward.

Improvements for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities reported at the last visit are starting to be more embedded into the systems of the school. Through professional development, teachers and teaching assistants have improved

their skills in setting activities which best suit the identified need. Planning includes a specific reference to meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is daily time available for pupils to work on targets from individual education plans. As a result, improved attitudes, perseverance and behaviour are evident for these pupils. Progress for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is better in Years 1 to 4 than in Years 5 and 6. This is because pupils in the upper years still have some way to go to make up for underachievement earlier in their school career. However, the school can demonstrate small steps of progress for these groups. HMI observed pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities included in all learning activities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Middle leaders have received professional development in the form of a coaching model from the Greater Manchester Challenge programme which has enhanced their skills and introduced them to a variety of monitoring tools. They are in the process of receiving training in the analysis of pupil progress information. They have written action plans which are incorporated in the school improvement plan and monitor planning and pupils' work. They look forward to the planned schedule of visiting lessons so they will be in a position to support and advise their colleagues in improving pupils' achievement. Middle leaders are enthusiastic and say they feel 'empowered' and committed to the task of raising pupils' attainment and accelerating progress. This is a valuable team to support senior leaders in moving the school forward.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have created a supportive team-working approach to raise achievement. There is an energy and drive which is being channelled towards effective self-evaluation and the correct identification of priorities for improvement. For example, the move to halt the decline in progress for pupils moving into Year 3 and the review of the curriculum to focus on writing across the curriculum show the school is identifying appropriate action to remedy weaknesses. Senior leaders use a variety of tools for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Findings from lesson observations are communicated to staff to improve practice. Action taken to strengthen the start of lessons has been successful and leaders have the chance to use this model to strengthen questioning and day-to-day assessment skills of teachers.

Since the last visit, members of the IEB have identified the growing capacity of leaders and managers and have enabled the headteacher to make strategic decisions. Through their expertise and regular contact with the school, members have held the school rigorously to account for these decisions and offered valuable support. Action is underway to establish a shadow governing body, followed by a substantive governing body which will have the necessary skills and knowledge to support and challenge the school.

External support

There is a good, professional relationship between the school and the local authority. The local authority continues to provide appropriate support. In an acknowledgment of the increasing capacity of school leaders to identify strengths and areas for improvement and take appropriate action, the local authority has significantly reduced the amount of direct support. Together with the school and IEB, the local authority is determined to accelerate the progress of the school.

The priorities for further improvement as identified at the inspection and the previous two monitoring visits remain the most pressing for the school.