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14 October 2011

Mrs Young  
Headteacher  
St Stephens' Church of England Primary School  
Robinson Street  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB1 5PE

Dear Mrs Young

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Stephens' Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit with Marguerite Murphy Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 12 and 13 October 2011, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2010. 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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 Strategic Director Families Health and Wellbeing Children's Services, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

September 2011



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2010**

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress by:
  - ensuring that all teachers use assessment effectively to plan learning for pupils of all ability levels in Key Stage 2
  - providing higher levels of challenge for more-able pupils throughout the school
  - ensuring opportunities for pupils to contribute to their learning by developing their speaking and listening skills
  - maximising the effectiveness of teaching assistants by extending current good practice more widely.
  
- Ensure leaders drive school improvement with a greater sense of urgency by:
  - using more accurate benchmarks for measuring pupils' outcomes in order to evaluate the school's performance
  - identifying sharp and measurable success criteria for school development within tighter timescales
  - providing training for members of the governing body so that their responsibilities can be fully and effectively implemented.

## **Special measures: monitoring of St Stephens' Church of England Primary School**

### **Report from the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 October 2011**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work and carried out lesson observations, some of which were observed jointly with the headteacher. They met with the headteacher, members of the school's leadership team, a group of pupils, teachers, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

#### **Context**

Since the previous visit the governing body has failed to appoint a permanent headteacher. Consequently, at the time of the inspection there were no firm arrangements for the leadership of the school beyond the first half of the autumn term. The school is working closely with five consultants whose involvement has been brokered with the local authority. One of these has been seconded to act as an additional deputy headteacher for one year. One member of staff has retired and a number of teaching assistants have changed their roles. Members of the governing body have appointed a new chair.

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

Assessments at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2011 indicated that attainment in English was broadly average but few pupils attained above the expected levels for their age. However, attainment in mathematics in Key Stage 2 remains well below average, as only 60% of pupils reached the expected level. Although progress in English has been stronger, the school's challenging targets for attainment and progress in mathematics were not met.

Pupils' learning and progress observed in lessons are variable, although they continue to improve steadily so that in around half of lessons pupils are now making good progress. Pupils enjoy learning and inspectors observed higher levels of motivation and engagement in lessons where pupils are sufficiently challenged and enthused; however, this remains variable across the school. Following increased emphasis on speaking and listening, greater opportunities were observed in lessons for pupils to engage in discussing their learning and they respond positively to this.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress – satisfactory

#### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Although attendance is below average, it is now very closely monitored and is showing some signs of improvement. The school has reviewed its policies and procedures related to

attendance. These have been communicated to parents and carers through letters and home visits for children beginning school which have focused on the importance of daily attendance.

Pupils' behaviour remains a strength of the school and pupils are polite and very well mannered. They are clear about the school's drive to make sure they attend regularly and said that improvements in systems for rewarding good behaviour are helpful.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Strengths in teaching indicated in the previous visit are being built upon. Where teaching is effective, teachers are clear about what pupils are to learn and they communicate this effectively. Consequently, in these lessons pupils are motivated and engaged and they understand what they are learning and what successful outcomes should look like. However, leaders are aware that this remains variable across the school and have suitable plans to address this. Teachers are continuing to respond positively to opportunities to develop their skills through professional development, such as that provided by consultants working with the school. They are receptive to feedback and keen to develop teaching further. The proportion of good teaching observed during the inspection was similar to the previous visit and inspectors found improvements in the teaching of Year 6 pupils. Following a review the school has improved the deployment of teaching assistants who are now able to be more effective in supporting pupils' learning.

The effectiveness with which teachers use information gained from assessing pupils' learning to inform the planning of tasks and activities to promote pupils' progress is still variable. Aspects of challenge and high expectation for more-able pupils and suitable consideration for the small steps in learning required by some pupils who have special educational needs are not consistently well met. This is because assessment is not ongoing and frequent enough to inform planning fully for these individuals and groups. The school has developed a marking policy; however, it is too early to see the impact of this on pupils' learning and progress.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage systems to observe and record the learning of children have been reviewed. Teachers have identified that these should be further refined to focus more clearly on recording the learning demonstrated by children and their next steps. The lack of covered space for learning outside is a challenge acknowledged by the school. Leaders accept that there are inconsistencies in the quality of planned outdoor learning opportunities when compared to the indoor provision.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The school is receiving significant levels of support from the local authority which has enabled it to develop clear systems to monitor improvement. However, these systems are not sufficiently embedded to demonstrate the impact of strategies to bring about required improvements. For example, the school has initiated pupil progress interviews for teachers

and leaders to review the progress of individuals. At the time of the inspection the school had not sufficiently evaluated the impact of support programmes and interventions on pupils' progress. In addition, the school has identified inaccuracies in its assessment data. Suitable training has been put in place to remedy this by improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Currently, the school's overview of pupils' attainment and progress is insufficiently robust and secure.

The school's 'Raising Attainment Plan' identifies measurable criteria for required progress by the end of the academic year. However, these are not broken down to smaller measurable milestones to enable school leaders to be held sufficiently accountable. Governors have recently begun to attend key meetings with local authority representatives and now realise the imperative to drive improvement at a greater pace.

Uncertainty about continuity in the school's leadership beyond the autumn half term is affecting governors' and leaders' ability to create a coherent vision and drive improvement. As a result, overall progress on the area identified at the previous inspection is inadequate because there is insufficient impetus in improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure leaders drive school improvement with a greater sense of urgency – inadequate

### **External support**

The school is currently heavily reliant on external support which is enabling the school to continue to make satisfactory progress overall. The school is well aware of the precarious nature of leadership arrangements and the need to work with the local authority and diocese to build long-term capacity within the school to secure improvement for the future.