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25 May 2012

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

Dear Mrs Young

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

Following my visit with Sheila Mawer, additional inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 May 2012, 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 fourth 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 – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

No more than two newly qualified teachers may be appointed on the following conditions:

- That they are supported by a teacher-mentor that can exemplify the good practice required to promote pupils' accelerated progress.
- That the school ensures there is frequent monitoring of the quality and impact of teaching and has strategies to intervene immediately should this fall below the standard required to improve pupils' outcomes.

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**

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **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 Stephen's Church of England Primary School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 May 2012**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work and carried out lesson observations, some of which were conducted jointly with the headteacher. They observed the teaching of reading to small groups and scrutinised a sample work in their books. They met with the headteacher, members of the school's leadership team, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

#### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been further changes in staffing. Three teachers and a seconded senior teacher have left the school. Currently, one member of staff is on long-term absence and five teaching posts are being covered by temporary teachers. The school has appointed 10 teachers who are due to take up post in September 2012.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The school's assessment information shows that there has been some improvement in pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics in Year 6. Teacher assessments for the end of Key Stage 2 indicate that pupils' attainment in English is broadly in line with expected progress and has improved on the results of the previous year in mathematics. If reflected in national tests, pupils' attainment would be above the government's floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress. However, this picture is not consistent across the school and weaknesses in pupils' attainment and progress in writing remain. Although there are areas where pupils' progress is improving more securely, particularly at the end of each key stage, there is still wide variation between different year groups and the better progress required to address this situation is currently hampered by staffing issues.

Although the school now has a better understanding of the progress and attainment of pupils with special educational needs, current assessment information has yet to demonstrate improvements in the attainment and progress for this group of pupils.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make steady progress. They were very excited at the prospect of their forthcoming jubilee party. They were keen to show inspectors party invitations they had written and their special books which show increasing skill in forming letters and writing simple words. This confirms the school's tracking information that children's progress in this area of learning is stronger although this improvement is not consistent across all six areas of learning.

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

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress – satisfactory.

## **The quality of teaching**

The school is fully aware of the instability in staffing and the challenge this presents in improving the quality of teaching. Where teaching remains stronger, lessons are characterised by positive engagement and motivation of pupils, learning proceeds at a brisk pace, and activities for pupils accurately meet their differing needs. Teachers' explanations are helpful although they still require even greater clarity and precision in planning and communicating exactly what pupils are expected to learn and what successful outcomes will look like. Overall, teachers engage positively with external consultants and are keen to improve further. In the small proportion of lessons that are unsuccessful, teachers' questioning, feedback and inaccurate match of work to pupils' needs are ineffective in stimulating and challenging pupils; consequently, pupils' progress is limited. Evidence from scrutinising pupils' books shows that there have been some improvements in the marking of pupils' work. Where this is most effective, teachers' feedback enables pupils to understand what they have done well and helps them to improve their work further and make better progress. However, there is still considerable variation in the quality and effectiveness of marking across the school. Similarly, there remains variation in the effectiveness of teaching assistants.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Improvements in pupils' attendance and punctuality have been maintained. The school communicates the attendance of classes to parents and carers regularly and celebrates good attendance. In lessons, particularly when they are well taught, pupils continue to have positive attitudes and engage enthusiastically with their learning. The school now keeps and monitors logs of pupils' behaviour. The headteacher, a governor and the school council have drafted a 'Respect for All' anti-bullying policy and charter which is due to be discussed and adopted by the governing body this term. This will help to ensure that pupils' awareness of all forms of bullying will be addressed and incidents of bullying based on prejudice will be reported and monitored. Systems for ensuring staff are checked and cleared to work with pupils continue to be well administered.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The school is managing the significant changes in teaching staff appropriately, although this has affected the consistency of teaching across the school. Programmes of support to improve weaker teaching have been put in place. However, the school is well aware that there is still much to do to improve the quality and consistency of teaching to bring about the required impact on pupils' progress and levels of attainment. The focus and frequency of the monitoring of lessons has improved.

Feedback to teachers and subsequent follow-up visits are now in place to support greater consistency in implementing strategies for improvement. However, due to staffing issues the impact of this recent improvement has yet to be demonstrated across the school. Middle leaders have engaged in monitoring and scrutinising pupils' work but further development of their role is limited by gaps in the school's staffing structure which are not due to be filled until September.

Members of the governing body continue to be involved closely in monitoring the work of the school. They have a clear view of the strengths and weakness and the improvements needed. These are reviewed honestly in regular meetings which chart the progress of the school against its improvement plans. Governors have been working with the headteacher and the local authority's School Improvement Officer in the appointment of a substantial number of new teaching staff for the next academic year.

Increasingly reliable data about pupils' progress and attainment are now providing leaders and governors with a clearer picture of progress and highlighting gaps in learning for different cohorts and groups. For example, the school now has a more secure view of attainment of pupils with special educational needs and has established an overview of the interventions and provision to meet their needs. However, the school is aware that there remain significant gaps in their attainment which need to close more rapidly. Work has already begun to ensure the new inclusion manager, who takes up her role in September, is fully aware of the accelerated progress required in this area.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress in both areas for improvement. However, there remain areas of weakness in pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in writing and in the attainment of some cohorts and groups of pupils. This is because the school has yet to sustain improvement and consistency in the quality of teaching which has also been affected by changes in staffing. Consequently, the overall progress since the school was placed in special measures is inadequate.

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

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

## **External support**

The school continues to benefit from support provided by the local authority's School's Ethnic Minority Service and consultants in mathematics and English. This has resulted in improved staff confidence and a number of improvements in pupils' progress and attainment. Although the secondment of a special educational needs coordinator has ceased, the school has appointed a new inclusion manager and has made appropriate arrangements to manage the transition this term. The local authority adviser continues to chair the regular round table discussions to monitor the improvements at the school.