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Mr Bennett
Interim Executive Headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
Peel Grove
London
E2 9LR

Dear Mr Bennett

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

Following my visit on 19-20 March with Jeremy Loukes, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss the actions taken to improve the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This was the fourth monitoring visit since the school became subject to special measures, following the inspection in September 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress toward the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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, the Director of Children's Services for Tower Hamlets and the Diocese of London.

Yours sincerely

Ann Debono
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2012

■ Improve teaching in English and mathematics by making sure that all teachers:

- make better use of assessments to plan lessons that meet the needs and abilities of all pupils
- check pupils' progress closely to ensure that all pupils are given good levels of academic challenge and support
- mark pupils' work effectively so that pupils know what they need to do to improve
- have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
- provide better support in lessons for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, so that their work is more accurately matched to their needs
- provide more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills when learning in other subjects.

■ Strengthen the capacity of leaders and managers to improve how well the school does by:

- making sure that the quality of teaching is rigorously checked so that it leads to improvements in pupils' achievement
- improving the quality of teaching by using a range of strategies, including good practice, coaching and mentoring
- introducing improvement plans that have a sharper focus on raising standards in English and mathematics, including setting more challenging academic targets
- checking, reviewing and evaluating the school's work more rigorously.

■ Increase the impact of the governing body on school improvement by making sure that:

- it holds school leaders robustly to account for improving the school's performance
- it becomes more actively involved in deciding the school's future
- it uses specific funding such as the pupil premium wisely so that those pupils whom it is intended to benefit achieve well.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 March 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, and members of the interim executive board. Discussions were held with representatives of the diocese and the local authority. Inspectors visited all classes with a senior leader. Documentation was scrutinised, including pupils' work, records to monitor teaching, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. The school improvement plan, pupil data and evidence from local authority and interim executive board meetings were evaluated.

Context

Since the last visit, one teacher has returned from maternity leave; a new part-time early years leader from the partner school, St Paul's, supports the Foundation Stage.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement remains inconsistent. School performance data and pupils' work from Nursery to Year 6 show stronger progress in English than mathematics. Standards in reading and writing continue to improve.

In reading, effective practice and high expectations by staff have secured strong progress. Leaders now introduce enhancement projects. A school librarian deepens children's knowledge of books and authors through storytelling sessions. A DVD, 'Read for Life', narrated by pupils in different languages, demonstrates exemplar practice in reading, spelling and phonics so parents can support their child at home.

Achievement in writing is improving. Work in pupils' English books is closer to nationally expected levels. Marking identifies development points but pupils do not routinely act on these comments to improve their next piece of work. When they do, however, as in Year 6, pupils make rapid progress. In other curriculum areas, opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills further by presenting their findings or research are sometimes limited unnecessarily by poor worksheets.

In mathematics, pupils do not make enough progress. Teachers are still not confident to develop pupils' mathematical understanding and skills. They do not routinely act on assessment information from lessons or in books. This means work is frequently too easy or too difficult and pupils repeat too many calculations of a similar type and level when they are ready for something new.

The quality of teaching

Staff are keen to develop their skills in the classroom. Leaders provide regular coaching and feedback sessions to help them reflect upon and then improve their practice. Teachers now use different approaches to meet planned learning intentions. Pupils engage in more group work and stronger questioning challenges pupils to explain the reasons for their answers. Teachers feel confident using equipment and resources. For example, an overhead visualiser helped pupils to see the properties of a square-based pyramid during class discussion. Group work was carefully crafted by the teacher in another lesson which enabled pupils to maturely justify ideas to improve the playground. However, despite these encouraging developments, leaders and teachers have not evaluated the effectiveness of teaching methods linked to improved achievement for all pupils. This is why strategies to improve teaching have not yet secured consistently good or better practice; too much still requires improvement.

Leaders acknowledge that evaluations of teaching and feedback to staff must refer to the increased rates of progress shown by pupils in lessons, in books and through robust analysis of achievement data.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of pupils features positively in school life. In lessons, pupils work together well and they respond quickly to adults' instructions. They are keen to be noticed for good behaviour. Pupils speak highly of recent changes, for example better behaviour, smarter uniform and their new teachers. Each week, selected pupils eat at a special table with the executive headteacher to share their ideas about how to improve the school.

Attendance and punctuality are monitored closely, and attendance rates are high. Strong systems ensure absences are closely tracked and concerns addressed with parents. Care for vulnerable pupils through work with partnership agencies is vigilant. Procedures ensure that pupils are safe when they are not in school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim executive headteacher and the senior leadership team have introduced essential school improvement systems, many adapted from effective practice at the partner school, St Paul's. Behaviour procedures are now clear, and disturbances in lessons or around school are infrequent. Standards in English are improving. Work with parents is strong; engagement with the local community features prominently through educational classes and workshops. A recent questionnaire shows that the vast majority of parents are supportive of the school's work. This current situation has evolved steadily since the school became subject to special measures. However,

key elements of practice are not robust or sharp enough to eradicate the last vestiges of historically poor performance.

Teaching is not consistently good because checks made by leaders have not secured strategies to rapidly improve progress in identified subjects, particularly mathematics. Similarly, the school's action plan does not focus sharply enough on monitoring pupil achievement targets at more frequent and tight deadlines. Leaders from the partner school provide very effective support; however, middle leaders have not been identified from within St John's School. This needs to be addressed urgently to strengthen leadership capacity and widen both accountability and responsibility for lasting improvements.

Since the last monitoring visit, the Interim Executive Board has prioritised ratification of the school's partnership as a hard federation. The Board meets monthly; its members challenge leaders about the rate of school improvement but they agree key aspects need to be swifter. Some information received from the school is not robust enough for members to form an accurate view. The overemphasis on coaching without sufficient regard to increased pupil achievement has allowed a too positive view to be formed about its overall effectiveness.

External support

The diocese has led a key piece of work to secure the future of the school. It has brokered a hard federation between St John's and St Paul's schools. This proposal is in final consultation stages with parents.

The local authority provides efficient and targeted intervention. School improvement resources are deployed strategically, using evidence gathered from regular intervention meetings, adviser visits, and teaching and learning reviews.

The task group must coordinate all external support, the work of interim executive board and that of school leaders to ensure rapid improvement in pupil achievement and the quality of teaching as the school approaches its fifth monitoring visit since it became subject to special measures.

The school should take further action to:

- sharpen monitoring and evaluation systems to demonstrate rapid and consistent rates of pupil progress
- create leadership opportunities for more staff.