

22 January 2015

Mrs Michaela Underwood  
Headteacher  
Great Marsden St John's Church of England Primary School  
Trent Road  
Nelson  
Lancashire  
BB9 0NX

Dear Mrs Underwood

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

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

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

The school may appoint one newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, provided that any teachers appointed receive an appropriate programme of induction and support.

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 Interim Executive Board (IEB), the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire and the Diocese of Blackburn.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013**

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is all at least good by:
  - providing staff with opportunities to observe high-quality teaching so they recognise what constitutes good and outstanding teaching
  - making sure teachers apply the advice they receive on how to improve the quality of their own teaching
  - matching learning tasks more effectively to pupils' wide-ranging abilities
  - teachers using day-to-day assessment to adapt their teaching to the changing needs of pupils in lessons
  - eradicating low-level disruption by making sure that pupils are more actively engaged and interested in lessons
  - improving the marking of pupils' work so that it informs pupils about how to improve their work and then allowing pupils time to respond to this guidance.
  
- Accelerate rates of progress in all subjects, particularly in mathematics, so that the achievement of pupils of all abilities is at least good by:
  - improving pupils' numeracy skills to ensure that they have a secure base for further learning and providing opportunities for pupils to apply these skills to real-life situations and in subjects other than numeracy
  - improving standards in reading by strengthening younger pupils' knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and increasing opportunities for pupils to read more widely.
  
- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, so that there is a greater collective capacity to improve the effectiveness of the school by:
  - ensuring that action plans have a sharp focus on improvement and are evaluated regularly
  - implementing fully the appraisal of individual teachers' performance so they are held rigorously to account to ensure that all pupils make progress that is at least good
  - developing the skills of subject leaders in checking the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects so they can provide helpful feedback to teachers and then ensure that teachers make effective use of this advice
  - updating regularly the newly introduced tracking system so prompt action can be taken to support pupils who are in danger of underachieving
  - increasing governors' involvement in checking the school's performance so they can identify strengths and areas for development, have a clear and realistic understanding of school effectiveness and are able to hold teachers to account
  - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 20 to 21 January 2015.**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work. He held meetings with the headteacher, the school's leadership team, three subject leaders and representatives of the local authority and diocese. In addition, the inspector met with six parents, eight pupils – all members of the School Council – and three members of the IEB, including the Chair. Accompanied by the headteacher, he visited every class to observe teaching and learning and to look at work in pupils' books. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including that relating to leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness, pupils' progress, governance and behaviour and safety.

### **Context**

Two new teachers have been appointed to the school since the September 2014 monitoring inspection. One, teaching in Year 4, is a newly qualified teacher (NQT). The other, teaching in the Reception class and leading the school's provision for early years, has been seconded from another school in the local authority. This teacher has taken on the role of assistant headteacher.

The former executive headteacher no longer carries out this role within the school. The IEB now comprises four members.

It is planned that the school will become an academy on 1 April 2015.

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

Work in pupils' books shows they continue to make better progress than they did in the past. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing. Likewise the gap between pupils with special educational needs, those learning English as an additional language and their peers is also closing.

Leaders' focus on reading and, for younger pupils, phonics (letters and the sounds they make), is paying dividends. As a result, pupils are on course to reach the targets set for them in this aspect of their learning. Pupils are also on course to meet targets in mathematics, not least because they are given regular opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in problem-solving activities. In Year 1, for example, the teacher's and teaching assistant's use of a range of apparatus enabled pupils to find missing numbers successfully. In this lesson, the teaching assistant was used very effectively to enable the most able pupils in the class find and explain different solutions to problems, such as  $5 + [] + [] = 11$ . Whereas in the September 2014 monitoring inspection, pupils' learning in mathematics was sometimes hindered by adults not always using mathematical vocabulary correctly, this is much less prevalent now. However, on a very few occasions, there is still an attempt to move pupils on too quickly before they have understood what is being taught. This causes pupils to become confused.

Leaders have correctly identified the need to focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing. While standards of spelling, grammar and punctuation continue to improve, targets for writing set for Year 2 and Year 6 pupils to achieve by the end of this academic year are, at this point, unlikely to be met. In Year 6, this is because of the legacy of underachievement experienced by this year group over time. In Year 2, a contributory factor is that expectations of how much pupils are to write are not as high as elsewhere in the school.

Pupils benefit from the support and challenge provided by teaching and higher level teaching assistants. In Year 5, for example, an assistant was used well by the teacher to enable a small group of pupils learning English as an additional language to participate in a lesson focusing on the use of relative clauses. As a result of this support, these pupils made good gains in their learning. However, because sometimes pupils work outside the classroom, the benefits of regular promptings and reshaped questions by teachers are not always felt in a timely fashion. As a result, if misunderstandings do occur, they are not always addressed quickly enough.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Leaders, however, through their honest evaluation of the school's effectiveness, rightly state that the quality is not consistently strong enough to ensure that most pupils make good progress. Nevertheless, there have been good improvements. In the Reception class, for example, purposeful learning is now the norm. Next steps for children to achieve – a weakness identified in the September 2014 monitoring inspection – are now sharply focused. Consequently, the progress children are making in their learning and development has taken off. Leaders agreed with HMI that records of the children's achievement could be improved further by identifying more clearly how next steps had been met.

Teachers are increasingly skilled at adapting their teaching to different and changing needs of pupils in lessons. For example, in a lesson in which Year 6 pupils were learning to work out different ratios, the teacher spotted where misunderstandings were occurring or where pupils were excelling. Consequently, the teacher changed her questioning to support or challenge as appropriate. Likewise in Year 3, the teacher recognised that pupils did not understand how to use inference. Rather than moving them on to independent activities too soon, she helped them to identify examples in various contexts. The result was, when the pupils went off to complete their activities, they did so successfully.

Teachers' marking and feedback continue to improve. The nearly routine use of 'fix it' time enables pupils to respond to corrections and suggestions made by adults. Leaders have correctly identified that the most able pupils in the school would benefit from this time being used to challenge pupils to deepen their learning further. Leaders have also identified that some marking of work in mathematics still does not routinely pick up errors made by pupils. They have also identified that, on a very few occasions, incorrect work is marked as correct.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Once again, pupils spoken with during this monitoring inspection reported how much they valued the support given to them by adults in the school. They have confidence that should a problem or concern arise, it will be dealt with. The low-level disruption identified in the November 2013 inspection report is not a common feature of the school today. The polite, well-behaved pupils observed during this and previous monitoring inspections are more actively engaged in their lessons than in the past. Their attitudes towards learning have improved. In Year 6, for example, as a consequence of joint work between the school and the diocese, pupils are increasingly demonstrating the characteristics of successful learners. Children in the early years conduct themselves well and with increasing independence. This is because routines and high expectations have been established and made clear. Children in this age group, for example, listen attentively to each other and the adults working with them.

Attendance continues to improve and stands currently at 96.6%, a 0.2% rise since the end of the 2013/14 academic year. Pupils are using their time in school increasingly well. Members of the School Council, for example, are helping the school's efforts in supporting a local food bank. Pupils' social and moral development is being promoted well through such activities. These, alongside spiritual development, are enhanced further through well-led acts of collective worship which allow pupils to consider themes, such as 'why actions speak louder than words'. They are also enhanced by visitors to the school, for example, the vicar helping pupils in Year 2 understand why the Bible is important to her.

Further improvements have been made to the way leaders record and learn from incidences of behaviour that do not meet the school's high expectations. As the case in previous monitoring inspections, the school's records for safeguarding pupils are up to date.

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

Openness, honesty and determination: these attributes are typical of the headteacher. She leads by example and does not shirk from making difficult decisions, challenging any underperformance, for example. Where support is needed, even at senior leadership level, it is provided quickly with sharp targets for improvement. The headteacher has created a team focused on improving the school and not being distracted by what is still uncertainty about when the school will become an academy.

The capacity of leaders to improve the school strengthens week by week. There has, for example, been a transformation in the quality of provision in the early years. In addition, good quality support is being provided for the NQT, including opportunities for her to observe good and better teaching. Pupils in the NQT's class are responding well to her demanding expectations. Furthermore, leaders have ensured that teachers are increasingly accurate in assessing pupils' writing and that pupils requiring additional support receive it in a timely fashion. Particularly pleasing is the growing strength of subject leadership. Teachers, relatively new to this role, are developing their skills well in identifying the most important areas to focus on. Furthermore, they are making sound judgements about the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and providing teachers with equally sound feedback.

Leaders' plans for improvement are focused on the right areas. Timescales, while challenging, are appropriate. The IEB continues to support and challenge leaders in equal measure. Members know the school well and, like the headteacher, are not afraid to ask searching questions and expect answers. Together, the IEB and leaders have high expectations.

Parents responding to the school's own questionnaire in December 2014 expressed greater satisfaction rates about the quality of education and leadership than in the corresponding survey in March 2014. While those parents spoken with during this monitoring inspection raised questions about the way the school communicates with them, they expressed their continuing confidence in the headteacher. They, and the inspector agrees, see improvements in attendance and punctuality and in the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour. With regards to communication with parents, leaders use the school's website, group calls and weekly newsletters to keep parents abreast with what is going on.

### **External support**

The good support and challenge provided by the headteacher of Christ Church Primary, Colne, formerly the executive headteacher of Great Marsden St John's, has been rightly re-brokered by the local authority. This demonstrates officers' and the IEB's belief that leaders of the school are increasingly able to stand on their own two feet. Nevertheless, the support and challenge have not been lost. Both schools have a partnership arrangement working together, for example, to check the ongoing accuracy of assessments of pupils' achievements.

The local authority's secondment of teachers, such as the assistant headteacher responsible for the early years, continues to prove to be most helpful and beneficial. Equally beneficial has been the support provided by the diocese in its joint work with the school to enable pupils in Year 6 increasingly to demonstrate the characteristics of successful learners.