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13 November 2008

Mrs Deana Aldred
Headteacher
St John's Church of England Primary School
Heath Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 2LE

Dear Mrs Aldred

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

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2008. 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.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for Cheshire and the Diocese of Chester.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett

H M Inspector

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

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the seconded headteacher, teachers and support staff, pupils, governors, parents, and representatives of the Diocese and of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the first monitoring visit three teachers have left the school and two new teachers have joined on secondment. The seconded teachers are due to return to their schools in September 2009.

Achievement and standards

The results of the national tests in 2008 at Year 6 were an improvement over those of 2007. A high proportion of the pupils (93%) achieved the national expectation for 11-year-olds (Level 4) in English, mathematics and science, exceeding the challenging targets set by the school and the LA. A smaller proportion of pupils attained the highest level (Level 5) than in 2007, particularly so in writing. Ensuring that more able pupils achieve Level 5 and improving writing have become action points for 2008–09.

The results of teachers' assessments in 2008 for Year 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics were lower all round than in 2007, although standards in mathematics were little different from those of the previous year. This cohort of pupils has experienced disruption over two years, which is thought to account for their lower standards. This means that there is much ground to be recovered by these pupils in Year 3.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) made very good progress during 2007–08. A high proportion of children reached many of the early learning goals desirable for children about to enter Key Stage 1 and many did so in nearly all of the six areas of learning.

During the monitoring visit, pupils were seen to have settled well into their new classes and most were making good progress in the lessons observed. This was particularly so for young children who are new to school, in the Reception class. Two classes where the regular teacher was absent were not observed. Parents are pleased with the way their children have settled this year and appreciated the

teachers sharing their targets for their children with them during an early parents' evening.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise pupils' achievement, especially in Years 3 to 6 –good.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain satisfactory overall, although they are improving. Pupils like coming to school. They are happy here and feel safe. Children from Traveller families think this is a good school. Most pupils have good attitudes and behave well. A minority are sometimes restless in class and find it hard to concentrate. They know the codes for behaviour that apply but have difficulty following them. In general, these are the pupils who have had their education disturbed by many changes of teacher. Some pupils have more specific behavioural and emotional difficulties. These pupils are provided for well: the school has developed a room where they can discuss issues with support staff, who then help them reintegrate into class.

Pupils respond well to lessons and activities to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their knowledge, understanding, awareness and empathy are growing; for example about environmental issues, such as FairTrade, and of the sacrifices others make, as demonstrated during an assembly on Armistice Day.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall, varying from satisfactory to outstanding. This is an improvement since the last visit, although not all classes were observed. In general, teachers cope well in meeting the needs of pupils with the wide range of ability to be found in each class.

Teachers' planning has improved considerably, as has their assessment of progress and how pupils are helped to understand what has been achieved and what is needed next. Typical activities in lessons are more varied. Much more frequent use is made of computers and computer programs to practise skills and test learning in different subjects. Teaching assistants and support staff play a major role in pupils' learning, especially for those who need extra help. Where teaching was less effective, expectations of pupils' work and their attitudes to their work were not always sufficiently high. Sometimes tasks given to pupils were not always well matched to pupils' capabilities.

The curriculum has improved considerably since the first monitoring visit, when progress in developing the curriculum was judged as inadequate. Parents feel that the curriculum is now more varied and exciting for their children. More opportunities are provided for pupils to practice key skills in other subjects, clear links are made between subjects, topics are more interesting and there are more opportunities for pupils to learn outside of school.

Provision for the EYFS, in Reception, is of outstanding quality. Children in Reception get the best possible start to school. The provision is strong in all its aspects and exceptionally effective in developing children's learning from their interests and enthusiasms. The teacher and teaching assistant work outstandingly well together.

Pupils' academic guidance was not evaluated fully on this visit. However, pupils' progress is rigorously tracked and regularly discussed by the headteacher and the class teacher. Systems for pastoral care and guidance continue to be of good quality.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and use of assessment – satisfactory.
- Provide a curriculum that better meets the needs of all pupils – good.
- Ensure that academic guidance for pupils is effective in helping raise their achievement – not evaluated.

Leadership and management

The school has made most progress in this area of its work. Improvement has occurred at all levels of leadership and management. Although the prospect of a change of headteacher in September 2009 worries parents, everything is being put in place to ensure a smooth transition with no interruption in the school's development.

The seconded headteacher has won the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. She is accessible, positive and supportive. She holds an accurate view of the progress that has been made and the areas that require further improvement. The school has settled well under her stewardship. The governing body now provides much better governance. It has been strengthened by new appointments, it is well informed, well organised and sensitive to the community it serves. It has already begun preparations to appoint the new headteacher, so as to ensure, as far as is possible, a smooth transition of leadership. The morale of staff is good. Teachers, particularly the Core Skills Team, work extremely well as a team; for example in their development of the curriculum. The teaching assistants and support staff have provided much needed stability to the school in recent years. They play significant leadership and teaching roles; for example in managing pastoral care, in supporting children with special educational needs and in developing the school environment and grounds.

The improvements in leadership and management are substantial. All involved in leadership and management are now focused on ensuring that outcomes for pupils are improved and sustained.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that improvements in the school's provision and in outcomes for pupils are established and sustained – good.

External support

The LA and the Diocese are providing good support for the school. They are working very closely together in a manner that is highly effective. The LA is deploying its resources well and providing effective support and challenge for the school, and the Diocese's commitment to the school as a member of its faith community is highly evident through the involvement of its representatives. Communication between the school, the LA and the Diocese is good.

The school is developing links with a number of partners to provide better for its pupils. These include links with local secondary schools, with the local Education Improvement Partnership, and with the Cheshire Development Education.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to consistently good.
- Secure a smooth succession in the leadership of the school that protects and enhances what has been achieved to date.