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Mr Andrew Tagg
The Headteacher
St Mary's Farnham Royal Church of England Primary School
Church Road
Farnham Royal
Buckinghamshire
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Dear Mr Tagg

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Farnham Royal Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 and 9 February 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 March 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 not 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 interim executive board, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and the Oxford Diocesan Board.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Improve leadership and management and build the school's capacity to improve by:
 - ensuring that developments are monitored closely by leaders at all levels to check that they are applied consistently and are effective at raising attainment
 - sharpening the use of data to check the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils.
- Build on existing good practice in some classes and improve the overall quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers make better use of assessment information to ensure that work is always pitched at the right level for all pupils.
- Improve provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language by:
 - ensuring that teachers receive training to help them understand how to meet pupils' needs more successfully
 - reviewing the current arrangements for supporting these pupils so that they are more effective at moving learning on.
- Improve attendance by working with parents and carers to help them understand the importance of sending their children to school.

Special measures: monitoring of St Mary's Farnham Royal Church of England Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other key staff, the chair of the interim executive board, and two representatives from the local authority. She spoke informally with staff and pupils during the course of the visit.

Context

One temporary member of the teaching staff left the school during the autumn term and has not yet been replaced by a full-time teacher.

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

The school's data show that there is still some variability in the progress pupils make. Despite evidence of some better progress lower down the school, rates of progress are inconsistent between reading, writing and mathematics, between year groups and between different classes in the same year group. Overall this means that pupils are not making up enough ground to reach levels of attainment that are expected for their age.

In lessons, progress is still too variable. Pupils are developing speaking and listening skills as a result of the school's focus on using talk partners, although at times such discussions reduce the time available for writing. The strong focus on extending pupils' vocabulary is paying dividends. Writing is the weakest area of pupils' work. Although they are learning about the structure of different forms of writing, such as stories, argument and letters, pupils cannot always put their own ideas on paper. Their work has many errors in basic spelling, punctuation and grammar. Presentation is weak. In mathematics, pupils are sometimes held back from making better progress because they have gaps in their knowledge which form the building blocks for learning. Also, difficulties with reading and interpreting the language of mathematics sometimes slow down the pace of work.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Much of the behaviour is good, with only occasional off-task behaviour where pupils are uncertain about the work they have been given. Sometimes pupils' enthusiasm gets the better of them and teachers have to bring them back on track to focus on the task at hand. Since the last monitoring visit there has been one fixed-term exclusion for one day. Relationships are positive both with teachers and with other pupils. Pupils work well together when given the chance, especially during practical

activities when they show how positive they are about their learning. Pupils respond well to opportunities to talk to a partner and enjoy the chance to share their ideas with others.

A number of strategies have been put in place to improve attendance. A system of rewards, including a weekly cup, encourages good attendance. Careful tracking, including analysing how attendance has a negative impact on pupils' attainment, is beginning to show some variations in the attendance of different groups of pupils. Such information is enabling the school to target specific families and to work in partnership with them to improve attendance. A clear and helpful information booklet for parents and carers covers a range of tips, procedures and consequences. Together with the local authority's welfare service, the school is planning to hold a workshop for parents on attendance matters. As a result of all this work the attendance figures for the autumn term were 94%, which is up 1% on the same term last year. The number of pupils persistently absent has fallen from fourteen to seven. However, unauthorised absence figures are high.

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

- improve attendance by working with parents and carers to help them understand the importance of sending their children to school – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Planning for activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved considerably since the last monitoring visit. Specific plans for focused activities led by adults are much clearer about how the activity will be adapted to meet the children's different needs. In practice, there is a strong focus from adults on questioning children carefully to establish their understanding and on developing their vocabulary. Plans include consideration of the needs of those who are learning English as an additional language as well as those who need more support from adults. Daily activities are amended to take account of children's interests. Despite some overlap and duplication of activities in the Reception classes, generally activities are interesting and resources are sufficient and well organised. However, in practice, there is a significant difference in the quality of children's learning depending on whether the children are indoors or outdoors. Indoors, children's personal and social skills are developing well. Children sustain a good level of concentration and purpose on the activities they choose to do. However, outside, children flit between activities and frequently chase around with little purpose. Here, they are playing rather than being engaged in a structured play activity. Adults are not quick enough to intervene to put children back on track. Children need more guidance about how to use the space to best advantage.

In the rest of the school, planning for literacy and numeracy lessons has improved since the last visit. Plans consistently show how teachers intend to adapt activities to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities, including those with special

educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language. A big change has taken place in the quality of the learning environment. Classrooms are now rich with language that is relevant to the areas being studied and displays celebrate pupils' learning. Teachers explain clearly what pupils are expected to learn and how they will know if they have been successful. Pupils are encouraged to reach the highest level of success criteria. At the end of lessons, a review of learning encourages pupils to reflect for themselves on what they have learnt.

Generally, lessons are well managed and well organised. In the main, activities are appropriate to meet the intended learning outcomes but, just occasionally, there is a mismatch between what is planned and what actually occurs. At times, teachers talk too much and explanations are overlong so pupils spend too much time sitting passively. The quality of marking has become more variable than at the last visit. While much is good, some gaps in marking are beginning to appear leaving pupils without the feedback to help them improve.

Developments in improving the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language have gathered pace. Training from the local authority has been well received and staff are working hard to put ideas into practice. There is a strong focus on extending pupils' vocabulary, both generally and specific technical vocabulary. Teachers make good use of word banks, vocabulary mats, talk partners, and visual prompts to support pupils' learning. Classroom displays reflect the wider community by celebrating religious festivals, stories from other cultures and pupils' home languages. Teachers' efforts to adapt activities are not always as successful as they might be, however. At times, pupils need more structured tasks, modified resources, or simplified texts to enable them to succeed. The leadership and management of the provision are developing well. Systematic tracking of pupils' progress shows that many are making better progress than their peers. A whole-school policy is under development which includes strategies for supporting pupils new to the school and new to the country.

The school provides some pupils with intervention programmes run by teaching assistants and overseen by the special educational needs leader. Despite high levels of support from the local authority, there are weaknesses in the management of special educational needs. A start has been made on tracking the impact of interventions by using data on pupils' outcomes, but there has been no analysis of why some pupils are making progress while others are not. The quality of the input by teaching assistants has not been monitored. Some intervention programmes are provided for pupils who speak English as an additional language and there is a lack of clarity about the precise nature of their need. Some pupils take part in two, three, or even four, separate interventions and it is not clear how these complement each other, how staff leading the interventions work together and how their work feeds into activities in class.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- build on existing good practice in some classes and improve the overall quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers make better use of assessment information to ensure that work is always pitched at the right level for all pupils – satisfactory
- improve provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to provide a clear steer for the school's work. The leadership role of literacy and numeracy leaders is developing well. Although still reliant on support, both are beginning to be proactive as well as reactive. They are clear about how their work will have an impact on improving teaching and learning to increase the progress pupils make. They are learning to manage and analyse the data, monitor planning and pupils' work, lead staff training, and advise staff on the subject.

Monitoring of the quality of teaching is sharper and more focused on pupils' learning. Teachers have clear areas for improvement which are followed up in subsequent lesson observations. Monitoring is regular, enabling leaders to track teachers' improvement over time. Lesson observations carried out with the headteacher and deputy headteacher during the visit confirm the accuracy of their judgements and their ability to identify clearly strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

The headteacher's evaluation of the progress the school has made so far is accurate and sharper than before. Although it could focus even more on the impact that actions are having on outcomes for pupils, it is, nonetheless, effective in identifying what needs to be done next. An updated action plan, focusing on the four key areas for improvement from the inspection of March 2010, is sharper. Targets for improving the quality of teaching and for increasing pupils' rate of progress are more ambitious. The school's other planning, encompassing development in wider areas of school life, is too general and missing key elements such as measurable outcomes, methods of monitoring, and precise objectives to make it an effective management tool.

The use of assessment information and data has taken a big step forward since the last visit. Systems are embedding well and the information is analysed and interrogated rigorously to provide a steer for further actions. An example is that staff training has been arranged in strategies to promote better writing from boys after the data identified this area of concern. Data are helping to pinpoint individual pupils who need more support or challenge in each class. Termly meetings to discuss pupils' progress are more purposeful and focused as a result of the improved quality of the data and the increasing confidence in the accuracy of teachers' assessment information.

The interim executive board functions effectively in its governance role. Members provide a good level of challenge as well as support for the school's leaders. Plans to extend the board to form a shadow governing body in preparation for the return of delegated powers are appropriate at this juncture. The role of the parent champion is developing well as the school seeks ways to engage parents and carers more in school life and to keep them informed of the school's progress. He is also supporting the school's drive to improve attendance.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management and build the school's capacity to improve
 - satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided a good level of support and guidance for the school in a number of key areas. The support has been targeted appropriately at specific areas of the school's work and/or to individuals needing support for their role. Importantly, the nature and focus of the support are kept under review so that the school's changing needs can be met effectively. The impact of the support can be seen most in improvements in the quality of planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, developments in teachers' confidence in meeting the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language, and in higher attendance figures. Individual teachers have also improved their practice as a result of support. Focus group meetings, chaired by a local authority representative, continue to provide a good level of challenge to the school's leaders thus holding them to account for the progress made.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the frequency and nature of opportunities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to learn outdoors.
- Clarify procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs, ensuring that appropriate support and, where applicable, intervention programmes are provided, monitored and checked for their impact on pupils' progress.