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Mr Andrew Tagg
Headteacher
St Mary's Farnham Royal Church of England Primary School
Church Road
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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 with David White, Additional Inspector, to your school on 6–7 October 2010, 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 first 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 are 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.

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 first monitoring inspection on 6–7 October 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other key staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, and a representative from the local authority. They spoke informally with staff and pupils during the course of the visit.

Context

Following the inspection, a new headteacher, who had been working in the school as a seconded consultant headteacher on a part-time basis, was appointed and took up his post in September. The acting headteacher resumed her duties as deputy headteacher from September. Two teachers also took up their appointment from September. Through discussion with the members of the governing body it was decided by the local authority that the best way forward was through establishing an interim executive board. The application was agreed by the Secretary of State in August.

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

The most recent results of National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 6 showed an improvement on previous years in both English and mathematics. The improvement was most marked in English, where results were a little above national figures; in mathematics results were a little below the national figures. However, this group of pupils had a higher starting point at the beginning of Key Stage 2 and the school's own data show some underachievement, particularly in mathematics and particularly for boys. It is important to note, however, that the historical assessment information on which progress measures are based is considered by the school's leaders to be unreliable. The results of teacher assessments for pupils in Year 2 show a fall from those of previous years. However, the school's staff and leaders are confident that the data are more reliable than in the past. The school's current data show that in each year group too few pupils are working at the levels expected for their age. The gap is greatest at the top of the school where just over half of the pupils in Years 5 and 6 are reaching expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Although most pupils are making some progress, they are not making enough to close the gap.

The learning and progress seen in lessons was very much reliant on the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of interventions by staff, and the appropriateness of the activity provided. There were no significant differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils in lessons observed; however, boys were generally not so

quick to apply themselves and to settle to the task. Pupils' good attitudes to learning were most evident when they were required to think for themselves and to ask questions about their own learning. Pupils rise to such challenges and need more of them. Pupils are developing communication skills well but writing is a noticeable weakness and some pupils need more support and guidance to structure their work.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour in lessons is generally good. Pupils collaborate effectively when required to work in groups. Just occasionally behaviour deteriorated as pupils' energy waned towards the end of a long session and when activities were not stimulating. Pupils are polite and helpful. Despite having little to do, playtimes are friendly and pupils get on well with each other. Pupils relate well with each other and friendships transcend racial and cultural differences. There were no exclusions last year and there has been one fixed-term exclusion this term.

The school is working closely with the local authority's education welfare service to promote good attendance. Systems for contacting parents and for following up absence are more robust. The school is taking firmer steps with parents, including the use of fines. Approaches are having a positive impact on attendance rates so far this term which are up by 4% to 96.5%. There is scope to analyse data further to make links between poor attendance and the performance of different groups of pupils.

Progress since the last section 5 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

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is rightly focusing on helping children to settle well to their new environment and to follow routines at the start of the term. A few children are still settling and occasionally wander between activities. Staff are observing and assessing the needs of those new to the provision. Systems for gathering and recording information are well organised in the Reception classes but a system for recording the initial assessments made on Nursery children is still being developed. Planning for the focused activities led by adults lacks detail and depth. It is not focused sharply enough on how activities will be adapted to meet the children's emerging needs or, for example, which specific language or specific skills will be developed. At times, opportunities for investigation are not maximised and opportunities for adults to intervene to move learning on are missed.

In the rest of the school, despite some improvements, the variability in the quality of teaching identified during inspection is still apparent. The positive impact of the training that staff have received on improving the quality of lesson planning, particularly in literacy and numeracy, can be seen in the common approaches being used. In all classes, teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn in the lesson. There is consistency too in the use of success criteria by which teachers and pupils will know whether they have met the lesson's objectives. Although these are always explained at the beginning of the lesson so that pupils know what they are expected to learn, references to the success criteria do not always lead to a higher level of challenge. Where success criteria are used best, teachers remind pupils of expectations part-way through the lesson to ensure that they are on track and to refocus their efforts. Activities are often adapted to reflect the abilities of pupils within the class but, too often, the lowest-attaining pupils, those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language are grouped together and supported by teaching assistants. Opportunities for these pupils to be taught by their teacher are not frequent enough.

Planning for other subjects is less detailed and makes little concession to the pupils' different learning needs or to their language needs. Although some lessons have a good focus on speaking and listening activities, generally the focus on developing specific technical vocabulary is not strong enough. Classroom displays are not rich with vocabulary. Talking partners are used occasionally by teachers to engage pupils in discussions and to help them clarify their thoughts. Such strategies are successful but not used widely enough. Teachers sometimes have preconceived ideas about the answers they expect and so do not readily accept the answers pupils give. They do not always use strategies that will enable all pupils to be involved in the introductions to lessons, allowing some to be passive. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly. Some good-quality marking tells pupils clearly what they must do to improve, but opportunities to follow up comments are not always provided.

Developments in improving provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, including those who are advanced learners, have been slow to move forward. Weaknesses in provision are still prevalent. Training for staff from local authority consultants has been provided only very recently. Staff are beginning to understand how to recognise underachievement in advanced learners but need more support in developing a range of strategies to use in class. Their confidence and skills in providing for pupils are low. Resources are not always adapted sufficiently, for example, and there is limited use of visual prompts or key vocabulary. The leadership and management of the provision are inadequate. The leader requires a greater level of training, guidance and support to undertake the role, although the support observed being given to a group of pupils in a lesson was satisfactory. Key aspects of provision are underdeveloped. For example, procedures for welcoming pupils and their families new to the country are not well established, there are no translations of key documents and resources are limited. There is little around the school to celebrate the diversity of pupils' backgrounds. However, pupils are

assessed quickly and their levels of English acquisition are monitored. Those identified as not making enough progress are now targeted for additional support. It is too early to gauge the impact of such intervention.

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 – **inadequate**.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher is building well on the positive start made by the deputy headteacher on actions to move the school forward following the inspection. Together they provide clear direction for staff so that staff report a clear focus for their work. Staff are reflective people, keen to learn and willing to improve. Their strong determination to do so will be a key feature of the school's ability to improve. Training from the local authority for improving teaching and learning has been well received and staff are endeavouring to put guidance into practice, albeit with varying degrees of success at present. The headteacher has accurately judged the progress made so far and has identified clearly what needs to be done next. However, his initial progress report does not focus enough on the impact of the actions taken on outcomes for pupils.

The school's action plan contains appropriate actions to tackle the weaknesses identified at the inspection in March. Most actions were planned to take place soon after the inspection. Consequently, some elements of the plan are becoming obsolete as dates and milestones are reached. A draft 'Raising Attainment Plan' is currently under construction and the headteacher has identified other areas of the school's work that need improvement. The intention to review the targets set in the original action plan and to bring together all the areas for improvement into a single coherent plan is well founded. However, it is vital to retain the focus on teaching and learning to raise standards. At present, the draft plan does not make clear how responsibility for leading actions will be separated from responsibility for monitoring the impact of the action taken. Without such separation there is a danger that an individual could be responsible for monitoring the impact of their own work. The success criteria do not focus sharply enough on outcomes for pupils.

The quality of monitoring of teaching, carried out by the School Improvement Partner, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, is too variable. Although, overall the school's view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching concurs with that of HMI, observations do not focus enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. Teachers are not always set targets for improvement which

can then be followed up in the next observation. Subject leaders for literacy and numeracy have received training and are beginning to monitor the quality of provision through scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' work. There are plans for them to observe teaching but it is important to ensure that the model for doing so is of high quality.

Much work has been done to improve the accuracy of the assessment information that the school's leaders use to analyse the pupils' progress. Systems for recording assessment information are becoming embedded and, importantly, used more widely by staff. Termly meetings to discuss the progress of each pupil are helping staff to identify those pupils who need more challenge and support. There is scope for further analysis of the information by, for example, gender, differences between classes, and ethnic groups.

The interim executive board has met twice and is currently putting systems in place to enable members to provide robust challenge to the school to move it forward swiftly. Members are experienced and bring a high level of expertise to the role.

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

Overall, support is satisfactory. The local authority's statement of action met requirements, with the exception of two small amendments which have not yet been made. The statement sets out clearly the support provided to the school prior to the inspection following the local authority's identification of the school as one causing concern. The target date for the removal of special measures is realistic. The local authority has a systematic approach to monitoring the progress of the school; in particular there is clear separation between the functions of monitoring and evaluation. Members of the focus group meet half-termly to offer a good level of challenge to the school's leaders and have already pointed to shortcomings in the quality of evaluation. The local authority took appropriate steps to establish the interim executive board.

Consultants provide advice and support through training for staff that is, reportedly, very helpful. As a result, teachers' confidence in themselves is growing and aspects of teaching, such as the quality of planning and the consistent use of success criteria, are improving. Support for improving the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language has been less successful until very recently.