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Mrs L Rosen
Headteacher
Romsey Abbey CofE Primary School
Church Lane
Romsey
Hampshire
SO51 8EP

Dear Mrs Rosen

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Romsey Abbey CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school with Ian Hancock HMI on 9 and 10 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2009. 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 Diocese, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009

- Rectify weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum in order to accelerate pupils' progress and raise their achievement by:
 - ensuring that teaching in all year groups is closely matched to all pupils' learning needs
 - providing all pupils with clear feedback on what they are doing well and how they can take responsibility for improving their performance
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to use and develop their writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to engage in practical and investigative mathematics and science
 - covering the ICT curriculum fully and developing pupils' use of ICT in different subjects.
- Enhance pupils' personal development and their preparation for their future lives by:
 - increasing opportunities for them to gain independence and initiative and to solve problems collaboratively in lessons and more generally
 - deepening their understanding of a modern, multi-ethnic society.
- Ensure that leaders and managers gain the confidence of the school community, embed ambition and drive improvement by:
 - rigorously monitoring and evaluating the impact of the provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, on pupils' progress and taking swift action for improvement
 - ensuring that staff understand, and are involved in, the distribution of responsibilities and that they are empowered to lead and develop the areas for which they are responsible
 - actively seeking, considering and responding to the views of parents.

Special measures: monitoring of Romsey Abbey CofE Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 November 2010

Evidence

The inspectors evaluated the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents and data. Seven lessons were observed, of which six were done jointly with the headteacher. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, members of staff and a group of parents and carers. Discussions were also held with pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The newly appointed headteacher took up her post in September 2010. Six out of the eight class teachers at the school are also new in post. The coordinator for information and communication technology (ICT) is still on leave, and ICT is currently being covered by one of the new teachers. The former deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term 2010. Six new governors have been appointed, of these: two are foundation governors, two are additional support governors, one is a local authority appointment and another was appointed by the Diocese. The school is in the process of recruiting an additional parent governor.

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

Pupils say their lessons have become more enjoyable and interesting. They appreciate the increased access to ICT, particularly the use of laptops in lessons; they also welcome opportunities to participate in more after-school clubs.

Pupils are now making satisfactory progress across the school and where teaching is best, such as in Years 3 and 5, progress is increasingly good. However, despite this positive picture, the rate of progress is still too slow in most classes to enable pupils to make up for the gaps in their learning. As a result, too many pupils continue to underachieve and too few are currently set to achieve the expected levels for their age at the end of Year 6. Nevertheless, the improved use of data and information on pupils' progress is enabling senior and middle leaders to gain a more accurate view of the progress made by every pupil in the school. This information is also being used to set realistic but more challenging targets and to raise the expectations of teachers of what their pupils can achieve. The sharper focus on the most vulnerable pupils, including those with medical needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is leading to these pupils now making greater gains in their learning than has previously been the case.

Pupils make the most progress in reading, but this is mainly in Key Stage 2. Mathematics, while improving more rapidly than writing, remains a weakness across

the school. The exception to this is in Year 3, where there are more pupils working above the levels expected for their age than in the rest of the school.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' increased enjoyment of coming to school is reflected in their improving levels of attendance. Parents and carers who spoke to the inspectors confirm that their children are visibly more enthusiastic about coming to school and doing their homework. They also appreciate the fact that their children are now given more opportunities to take on meaningful responsibilities around the school, such as being head girl or head boy and becoming active members of the school council. The improvements made to the quality of teaching and learning are helping pupils to become better prepared for their future lives; however, the school recognises that there is still a long way to go. Pupils' basic skills, although still generally too low, are nonetheless improving. Pupils are also learning more about other cultures and countries such as India. However, their knowledge and appreciation of modern-day multicultural Britain as well as other faiths is still very limited.

A good example of where staff have been consistent is in their application of the new behaviour policy. This has led to a more calm and supportive atmosphere in the school; pupils are confident that teaching staff in particular will help them to resolve disagreements. However, they are less positive about the quality of support they receive at lunchtime. This was also reinforced by parents and carers who expressed concerns about the organisation of lunchtimes as a whole. Some parents and carers also feel that certain spiritual aspects of the school do not seem to be as high profile as they used to be, such as saying grace before mealtimes.

Pupils demonstrate an increased understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and are benefiting from the improved quality of provision for physical education now provided by specialists.

Judgement

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

- Enhance pupils' personal development and their preparation for their future lives – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching in the school is now securely satisfactory and no inadequate lessons were observed on this monitoring inspection. Teachers now include more opportunities for pupils to work independently and collaboratively in lessons. There are increasingly good examples of pupils undertaking investigative activities in mathematics and science. However, there are still missed opportunities for

developing and embedding basic skills across the curriculum, particularly those of reading and writing. There are pockets of good practice in the school; however, there is lack of consistency in the way teachers undertake key aspects of their work. This includes how they plan, mark pupils' work, provide feedback to pupils and make use of targets or use assessment strategies to support pupils' learning. This lack of consistency is unhelpful to pupils. Additional weaknesses in too many lessons include limited challenge for the most able and limited support and guidance for those who find learning more difficult.

The school has developed a helpful chart that shows how different subjects can be linked and this is leading to learning being placed in a more meaningful context. This has led to significant improvement in the development of pupils' ICT skills and capabilities as well as more effective use of ICT as a learning tool. A slight change to the school timetable has also led to support staff being used more efficiently and effectively to support learning in lessons.

Staff have worked very effectively to enable pupils to settle quickly despite the many staff changes that have taken place. This has led to pupils feeling very well cared for and well supported. This in turn, has contributed to the school developing a more inclusive community in which all feel more valued and respected.

A number of parents and carers with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, now feel that the needs of their children are being recognised and are finally being met.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In a short space of time the newly appointed headteacher won the confidence of pupils, parents, carers and staff. She helped to bring about a degree of stability to the school that until now has been lacking. She is well supported by staff and the governing body and has welcomed the support from the local authority.

The headteacher and leadership team are monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's work more effectively. This has enabled them to gain an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, when identifying priorities for action, there has not been a sharp enough focus on the key areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. This has led to some staff feeling overwhelmed by all that needs doing.

New staff are rising to the challenge of helping the school to improve, and an increasing number are becoming more empowered to support the school improvement process. However, the quality of action and improvement planning is very variable. All too often these documents do not detail how pupils will benefit from changes and actions; success criteria are not quantified and there are too few interim milestones to gauge progress. These documents do not prioritise the key

areas for improvement sufficiently well. This is preventing leaders and managers from working even more effectively as a team to help the school as a whole.

The governing body is keen to do its best for the school and has been strengthened by the addition of new governors. There is clear evidence of governors challenging the school and contributing to the direction of the school. However, the governing body has yet to ensure that it meets all its statutory responsibilities in full; this includes providing information to parents and carers about the impact of key policies as well as ensuring that the single central record is kept up to date and complies fully with government requirements.

Parents and carers speak positively about how welcome they now feel and how approachable they find the new headteacher as well as all the new staff. They appreciate having their views sought and now feel that what they have to say is being listened to, valued and taken into account. However, there is still a concern about the timeliness of information and the lack of explanation at times, such as why changes are being made to the school timetable. Parents would also welcome knowing more about the governing body, who they are, their roles and who to contact if they would like an issue to be raised. Some parents and carers expressed the view that they do not receive sufficient information from the governing body and are unclear about the school's complaints procedure and whether or not one exists.

Nevertheless, parents and carers are now more involved with the work of the school and their children; they are contributing to developing a renewed vision for the school and are working in greater partnership with staff to support the education and well-being of their children.

Judgement

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

- Ensure that leaders and managers gain the confidence of the school community, embed ambition and drive improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided to the school, although very variable, has been satisfactory overall.

The original timescales for the provision of external support have not all been maintained. This is largely due to substantial changes to the leadership and staffing of the school since the previous monitoring visit. However, it is also due to some shortcomings and inconsistencies in the establishment of support for particular subjects and for the Early Years Foundation Stage. The local authority has

recognised this and has recently taken swift action to improve the consistency of support provided.

The local authority plans for the improvement of individual subject areas are well structured and appropriately resourced. However, they do not always show clearly the link between actions and the key issues identified in the previous inspection. Some subject leaders are being supported well to help them to lead developments in the school, such as in mathematics. Staff speak highly of the quality of support provided for mathematics and science. The difference that this support has made can be seen in the school's greater progress in developing mathematics rather than English.

Until recently, the school has not been sufficiently involved in planning, reviewing and refining the external support provided. Furthermore, the school, the governing body and external partners have not been working as cohesively together as they could, and that has at times slowed the rate of progress.