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

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

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 May 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 third 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

As agreed, one newly qualified teacher may be appointed to Key Stage 1 from September.

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 third monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 May 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 formally with a group of staff and a group of pupils as well as informally with staff and pupils during the course of the inspection.

Context

Three members of staff left during the spring term and have not yet been replaced by full-time permanent staff. Currently, four classes are taught by supply staff. Three experienced teachers have been recruited for September. The number on roll remains stable.

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

The school's data show that pupils are beginning to make better progress, although not consistently. Progress is generally greater in Years 1, 2, 3 and 6. Although more pupils are working at the levels expected for their age, there is still some catching up to do, especially for older pupils where pockets of underachievement remain. Attainment is closest to expected levels in mathematics in Key Stage 1. Steady progress in reading in most years is not matched by that in writing, which remains the weakest element of pupils' work. Pupils learning English as an additional language are progressing at least as well as their peers. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make inconsistent progress. Not all interventions and catch up programmes are having the expected impact on accelerating pupils' progress. The school's checks on progress suggest that over time girls are catching up more quickly than boys, especially in writing.

This picture of progress and attainment was confirmed through observations. In lessons, the good emphasis on developing vocabulary is helping pupils to think through what they want to say. It is also helping to improve the content of pupils' written work, especially lower down the school. However, the pace of writing is sometimes constrained by weaknesses in spelling strategies. The regular use of talk partners is working well to raise pupils' engagement in lessons. As noted previously, gaps in older pupils' prior learning in mathematics, and a lack of confidence in manipulating key number facts, hold them back and constrain the rate of progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Good behaviour is evident as pupils move around the school and during lessons.

Positive attitudes to learning and sustained concentration continue to be features of most lessons. Pupils persevere well and respond enthusiastically to practical activities. Relationships between pupils are generally good. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that disagreements are sorted out quickly and easily, especially if the headteacher becomes involved. They feel that the red and yellow card system works well at break times. There has been one fixed-term exclusion since the last visit.

Attendance figures continue to improve and, at 94.3% for the academic year so far, are much better than the 91.9% figure for the same period last year. The number whose attendance falls below 90% continues to drop, as does the number of pupils who are persistently absent. Importantly, around 40% of pupils have attendance figures over 98%. Rewards for good attendance are having a positive impact and the school celebrates the improving figures with parents in an 'attendance newsletter'. The school's rigorous approach to following up absence is paying dividends.

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 – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is still evolving. The range of activities available in the outdoor area is developing soundly. Planning takes account of children's interests and resources are changed and updated daily. As a result, children's learning in the outdoor area is more sustained than that seen previously. There was little flitting between activities and only one or two children were not fully engaged in learning. Adult-led tasks are generally well directed. However, the deployment of staff to activities is not always efficient, with staff attached to an activity that children could undertake independently and missed opportunities for adults to develop learning in key areas such as role play. Children are learning routines and expectations. Their personal, social and emotional development is good; they are generally settled and behave appropriately. Their literacy skills are weak. Children do not have sufficient opportunities to develop and practise writing skills, including in the outdoor area. The sessions where children were learning letter sounds did not work well. The time available was too short to ensure focused learning that linked the knowledge of sounds and letters for reading with practice in writing. There is work to be done to improve systems for assessing children's learning and progress. Observations are not made often enough and do not cover the full breadth of children's learning. They are inconsistent in quality.

In the rest of the school, teachers continue to work hard on planning lessons, although such effort does not always translate into practice. Despite the fact that inconsistencies remain, more lessons had good features at this inspection. Tasks are generally purposeful and relevant. The learning environment continues to improve and most classrooms are bright and attractive with displays, especially of key words, that support pupils' learning. The emphasis on vocabulary is working well,

particularly for those learning English as an additional language, and some staff are working hard to provide pupils with visual prompts for learning as well as modified tasks and resources. Shared talk between pupils is a feature of almost every lesson and teachers now plan this element. The quality of marking is improving in most classes. It praises pupils' efforts, notes what they have done well, and sets them areas for improvement. Pupils say that they find the marking helpful and, alongside their targets, they are clear what they need to do better next time. Older pupils know the levels at which they are working and younger pupils are starting to talk about what they are *learning* rather than what they are *doing* in class.

Teachers model examples of writing for pupils, although some are more successful at this than others. The main weakness here is the imbalance of input from the teacher with pupils' participation. At times all pupils are given the same task and this does not meet their needs. Some worksheets are not easy for pupils to read and sometimes the language is too complex for pupils learning English as an additional language. In mathematics lessons there is sometimes too much emphasis on using a particular strategy at the expense of teaching pupils to recognise the most efficient method. In general, there is too little emphasis on developing mental strategies. Pace is an issue in some lessons and, where the timing of lessons goes awry, there is too little time at the end of the lesson to round up the learning.

Specific programmes for pupils with special educational needs that are taught by teaching assistants outside of the classroom are delivered soundly. The main issue remains one of communication between the assistant and the class teacher so that the content of the programme can be reinforced in class. Some streamlining of intervention programmes has taken place, but there are still some pupils having more than one intervention programme from different staff without a clear rationale for how the programmes complement each other.

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 leadership role of literacy and numeracy leaders continues to develop well. Both are taking a greater role in leading the development of teaching through staff meetings and supporting their colleagues. Joint observations during the inspection showed the accuracy of their judgments and clarity of understanding about how to help colleagues improve their practice. The new leader and manager for special educational needs is tackling the role with enthusiasm and determination. Supported by the local authority, there is a clear awareness of the work that needs to be done

to ensure that pupils are having appropriate support and making appropriate progress. Nonetheless, a positive start has been made.

Since the last inspection, the number of formal observations of teaching has been reduced as a result of concerns about staff morale and workload issues. Drop-in observations have continued but have not been recorded so that the level of rigour in identifying and following up weaknesses in teaching has not been sustained. It is essential that the pace of improvement in the quality of teaching is maintained and that remaining inadequacies are eradicated through targeting the weakest areas of teaching.

Self-evaluation is accurate and supported by thorough analysis of the school's wealth of performance data. Meetings to discuss each pupil's progress identify and target those that need support and/or challenge. The next step is for teachers to develop the skills to undertake their own analysis of data. Staff admit to a feeling of being overwhelmed with new initiatives at times without the time to embed new features into their teaching before being presented with more new expectations. Although staff morale is said to have been 'up and down', there is a sense that it is improving this term and that a sense of team spirit prevails. The commitment of staff to making the necessary improvements is in no doubt.

The school's action plan to address the issues from the inspection of March 2010 is updated regularly; new actions are added and targets are reviewed. Actions are planned for the short term and there is scope to begin considering longer-term actions. The interim executive board continues to challenge the school well. Appointments have been made to the shadow governing body with plans to move towards the return of delegated powers in due course.

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 continues to provide a range of support directly and through the services of a local school. Concern about overload and saturation has led the school to pull back from some universal support to give staff time to embed new initiatives. Nonetheless, individual staff have benefited from support to improve their teaching, especially from the consultant from the Improving Schools Programme. Reorganisation in the local authority will result in changes to the personnel supporting the school, including the school's improvement partner, and to those who challenge the school's leaders at focus group meetings. Despite such changes, the local authority is committed to ensuring continuity of support, guidance and challenge for the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that opportunities for writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage are high profile and provided through a range of activities including those provided outdoors.
- Continue to review the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensuring that support, both in class and through intervention programmes, is appropriate and has a positive impact on their progress.