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Mrs Hester Wooller
Executive Headteacher
Shinfield St Mary's C of E Junior School
Chestnut Crescent
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 9EJ

Dear Mrs Wooller

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shinfield St Mary's C of E Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 June 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 fourth 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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wokingham and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is at least in line with the national average by July 2010.
- Improve pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is consistently satisfactory or better throughout the school by July 2010 by:
 - ensuring that teachers provide pupils with challenging work which meets their needs well
 - involving pupils fully in understanding how they can improve their work.
- Develop the curriculum so that it is stimulating and motivating with opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills and develop as independent learners.
- Develop the skills and activities of leaders and managers at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance in order to bring about rapid and sustained improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Shinfield St Mary's C of E Junior School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents, including those that track pupils' progress, and looked at pupils' written work. She met with the executive and associate headteachers, staff and pupils, members of the interim executive board and representatives of the local authority.

Context

At the beginning of the summer term an associate headteacher was seconded to the school to provide additional senior leadership capacity, for one term in the first instance. The interim headteacher remained as executive headteacher, working the equivalent of three days each week with the school. Following normal recruitment procedures, the associate headteacher was appointed to the post of permanent headteacher with effect from September 2011. A shadow governing body has been appointed to work alongside the interim executive board from 1 July 2011.

A part-time teacher left the school at Easter to take up a post in another school. The school appointed a teacher to replace her from the beginning of the summer term, and a further three new teachers for September as a result of staff moving to new jobs and an increase in the number of pupils due to join the school in September. Pupil numbers have remained fairly stable overall since the previous monitoring inspection, with seven pupils leaving and five joining the school. Over the course of this academic year, the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has risen from less than 1% to almost 7%.

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

The executive headteacher's decision to increase the amount of time for teaching literacy and numeracy in the short term in order to address the issue of underachievement in writing and mathematics has had a positive impact. The school's data indicate that by May 2011, all pupils had made measurable progress in mathematics and the vast majority in writing since last September. Over the same period in both mathematics and writing, around half of pupils across the school had made better than expected progress. However, this varies from class to class, as does the proportion of pupils who have made at least satisfactory progress since the beginning of Year 3. While in part these variations can be attributed to the quality of teaching the pupils have experienced, the school's own analysis of data indicates that some groups are more vulnerable than others. In particular, senior leaders know that they need to keep a careful check on the progress made by those pupils who enter Year 3 just below the level expected for their age, those with below

average attendance and those who are learning English as an additional language. They also know that they need to ensure that those pupils capable of achieving the higher levels are fulfilling their potential.

Observations of lessons and discussions with pupils during the monitoring inspection show that pupils are consolidating previous learning or acquiring new knowledge from day to day. This is confirmed by the progress seen over time in their books and assessment records. Pupils generally appreciate that staff work hard to make lessons interesting and enjoyable, and respond by getting involved in class discussions and applying themselves to individual or group activities. They are less dependent on teachers' or teaching assistants' support and more confident in their ability to have a go and more prepared to take responsibility for their own learning.

Because pupils' progress is improving, attainment is rising and the gap with the national average is narrowing. The school's data and assessments indicate that the outcomes of recent national tests for Year 6 pupils will show that standards in writing are just above the national average, and in reading and mathematics just below.

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

- Raise attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is at least in line with the national average by July 2010 – satisfactory.
- Improve pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is consistently satisfactory or better throughout the school by July 2010 – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school's data indicate that attendance has been average over the year to date, with some recent improvements in the number of pupils whose attendance is low. However, during the monitoring inspection, attendance was below average and almost half of the pupils absent were on holiday. The new headteacher has already taken action to review the school's policy to make sure that it is clear to parents how important regular attendance is, and that holidays in term-time will not be authorised in future.

In the main, pupils know how to conduct themselves and behave well around school and in lessons, and show respect for each other. Of particular note during this monitoring inspection was pupils' growing confidence and willingness to engage in discussion both with school staff and with the inspector in lessons or in small groups. The school council members appreciate, and are rightly proud of, their involvement and influence in work such as developing a sustainable school environment and appointing a new headteacher.

The effectiveness of provision

Lessons observed during the monitoring inspection and scrutiny of recent monitoring in school by the executive headteacher and an external consultant suggest that teaching is now consistently satisfactory, and that an increasing proportion is good. There is usually a clear focus on learning, as teachers share with pupils what they want them to learn, explicitly teach new ideas or skills, use strategies to encourage active participation and review with pupils how well they have done at the end of lessons. However, as the school recognises, there is more to be done to develop both consistently effective questioning and pupils' skills in assessing their own and others' work. The role of the teaching assistant in each lesson is clearly stated in the planning, but there is a tendency for them to be used more often than the class teacher to work with the lower attainers in group activities.

Teachers assess what pupils understand during lessons and are increasingly prepared to adapt their plans accordingly. Teaching assistants contribute to these ongoing assessments by noting observations of the pupils they work with during lessons. However, while some observations by teaching assistants clearly assess the learning that has taken place, others are not as useful, as they simply record what the pupils did or how they did it. Individual target sheets help pupils to be clear about the level they are working at and what they need to do to move to the next level. However, it is not clear how useful these are as no reference was made to pupils' targets in any of the lessons observed during the monitoring inspection. Marking is more consistent in giving pupils feedback on how to improve. Pupils report that they find it useful and that they have opportunities to respond to the teachers' comments to correct or improve their work.

The system for ongoing assessment against criteria for different levels of attainment is established and feeds into regular tracking of pupils' progress. As a result of regular moderation activities, senior leaders are confident in the accuracy of teachers' assessments of individual pieces of work. However, they recognise that it is important to assure themselves that assessments of pupils' overall performance are based on what they can do both independently, and can apply at different times and in different situations to be confident they are secure judgements.

The curriculum is increasingly better matched to pupils' needs. The new approach to teaching writing has had a positive impact on their motivation, independence and resilience as writers. Discussions with pupils at the beginning of topics to find out what they already know and what they want to learn encourages them to take responsibility for their learning. The executive headteacher's focus on developing pupils' collaborative skills is having a beneficial impact on teaching strategies and on pupils' willingness to work independently of adults. However, there are occasions when teachers miss opportunities for direct group teaching while they are acting as facilitators.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

- Develop the curriculum so that it is stimulating and motivating with opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills and develop as independent learners – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There is a determination at all levels not only to address current priorities and bring about improvement in the short term, but to secure the future success and increase the capacity of the school. The interim executive board has been relentless in its determination to appoint the right headteacher, rejecting candidates they did not judge to be of a high enough quality through four rounds of recruitment. The executive headteacher has shown similar tenacity in the appointment of new staff who bring a range of relevant experience. The new headteacher is already establishing her high expectations of the school, staff and pupils by working alongside staff, leading assemblies and meeting with current and prospective parents. Middle leaders continue to grow into their roles, some beginning to evaluate what is working or investigating what factors might be at play if pupils are not making sufficient progress. In the short term, the new headteacher has taken responsibility for provision for gifted and talented pupils, including establishing systems for identifying them and building links with other schools and organisations to develop opportunities for specialist input. However, staff changes in September mean that there will be changes in middle management again and while incoming staff potentially bring some key strengths, as yet, plans as to who will lead which areas of responsibility have yet to be finalised.

Better data and systems for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets enable senior leaders to check how well pupils are doing and whether they are fulfilling their potential, and also the interim executive board to hold the school to account for pupils' achievement. Class teachers are expected to be familiar with the data for their class and to identify any pupils who should be targeted to improve their progress prior to one-to-one pupil progress meetings with the executive headteacher. In order to accelerate progress to make up for previous underachievement, a range of intervention programmes and booster classes have run this year. This has included the executive headteacher and a local authority consultant providing additional teaching for some pupils, in particular the higher attainers. Senior leaders acknowledge that this is not sustainable in the long term and that it is important to ensure that all teachers have the skills to meet, and recognise their accountability for, the range of abilities and needs within their class, including the growing number of pupils learning English as an additional language.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

- Develop the skills and activities of leaders and managers at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance in order to bring about rapid and sustained improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The significant investment the local authority has made in time and resources is beginning to pay dividends. Local authority officers were instrumental in brokering an associate headteacher to provide additional leadership capacity, and have worked closely with the interim executive board and diocese to appoint a permanent headteacher and shadow governing body. Support from the mathematics consultant has effectively combined modelling teaching strategies for teachers while providing additional challenge and support in the short term for pupils who need it. Regular high priority meetings ensure careful track is kept of the school's progress and contribute to better communication and clarity of roles between different partners.