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

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

Following my visit with Gill Walley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 September 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 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.

No additional newly qualified teachers may 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 September 2011

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 another member of the board who is the 'parent champion', and a representative from the local authority. They met formally with new staff and groups of pupils and informally with other staff and pupils during the course of the inspection.

Context

As expected, five class teachers left at the end of the summer term. Six new teachers were appointed from September, including one newly qualified teacher. Two classes are taught by staff on temporary appointments. The number of pupils on roll remains steady. A shadow governing body has been appointed in line with the local authority's plans to hand back delegated powers in January 2012.

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

Data from assessments at the end of Year 2 show that attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has improved on that of the previous year. Results of assessments of Year 6 pupils show that attainment is lower than in the previous year. It is similar to the national figures in English but below them in mathematics. Nonetheless, the school's data show this group of pupils made good progress during their time in Year 6. The school's data show that some pupils are making accelerated progress in some years to reach levels of attainment that are closer to expectations for their age. Weaker progress is linked to past inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. There are no significant differences in the progress of pupils who are learning English as an additional language and their peers, or in the progress of those pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The progress pupils make in lessons is variable between classes and subjects. Mainly this is the result of having tasks that are not pitched at quite the right level for their ability. Some pupils said that sometimes work is too easy. The school's focus on improving pupils' writing is beginning to show an impact. More pupils are using interesting vocabulary and phrases in their writing, although the structure of their writing, spelling and presentation remain weak. For some, the pace of writing is slow and laboured. Generally, pupils apply themselves well and are keen to learn. They enjoy discussions and learning from each other. They have positive attitudes to learning, although concentration drifts in some lessons where the pace of work is

not challenging enough. Self-assessment at the end of lessons helps pupils to reflect on what they have learnt.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good. Some restlessness in lessons or quiet passive behaviour is linked to the calibre of the teaching. Staff have little need for overt behaviour management and pupils quickly get back on track. There has been one fixed-term exclusion since the last monitoring inspection. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults are good. Playtimes are pleasant; pupils mix well and friendships cross cultural and ethnic groups. The children in Nursery and Reception classes are reasonably well settled, considering the short amount of time they have spent in school.

The school continues to place high priority on improving pupils' attendance. With a final figure of 94.7 % at the end of the last academic year and a positive start to this year, attendance rates are still improving. Persistent absence has reduced significantly and more and more pupils gain rewards for high levels of attendance.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection in 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

A positive start has been made to reorganising the resources in the Early Years Foundation Stage to make better use of the space and to provide a more coherent learning environment. The challenge will be to ensure that activities have sufficient breadth and scope to meet the needs of children with a wide range of abilities and experiences. Plans to increase the range and frequency of literacy activities are appropriate. At present, with several new staff as well as new children, routines and expectations are still becoming established. Staff and children are getting to know each other and staff have begun to assess the children's needs through observing their play. Further training is planned to ensure all staff are confident in making observations and to assure better consistency and quality than in the past. Activities in the outdoor area are not yet complementing and extending the learning opportunities inside.

In the rest of the school, some elements of teaching are highly consistent. Without exception, teachers plan thoroughly to the school's format and adopt a systematic approach to setting learning objectives and identifying levels of expectation for pupils of different ability. Teachers' marking of pupils' work follows the school's guidelines and provides a helpful steer for pupils to improve their work. Some marking is exemplary. Relationships in class are positive, with praise and humour used well to set expectations for pupils. Strategies for engaging pupils in learning,

such as talk partners, continue to work well. Just occasionally, mainly in the classes of staff new to the school, pupils learning English as an additional language do not have enough visual prompts to support their learning.

Despite these positive aspects, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. More examples of good teaching were seen at this monitoring inspection and characterised by: a high level of challenge for all groups of pupils; a step-by-step approach to new learning; high expectations of work rate; and tasks that match the pupils' needs. The challenge for the school is to spread this good practice more widely. Too many lessons continue to fall short of their intended outcomes and pupils do not learn enough. In the main, this is because the level of work is too low or the pace of learning too slow. Occasionally, activities do not meet the objective of the lesson. In the bulk of lessons, tasks are generally motivating but they are not always pitched at the right level to ensure sufficient challenge and/or support for all groups of pupils. At times teachers talk too much and give pupils too many instructions.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection in 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 – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Morale among staff is better than at the time of the last monitoring visit. New staff are settling well. The school's systematic process of induction has provided clear expectations of them so that they are aware of the part they must play in the school's recovery. There is a positive atmosphere in the school and a clear sense from all staff that they are moving forward under the clear direction of senior leaders.

Responsibilities for leading the school are now spread more widely than the headteacher and deputy headteacher, thus building capacity for sustainability in the future. Senior leaders are playing an important role in supporting staff to improve teaching through team teaching, support with planning and leading staff training. They recognise that there is more to do but are clear what needs to be done and the action they need to take. For example, the leader of special educational needs is tackling the issues raised at previous monitoring inspections, including improving systems for communication between class teachers and teaching assistants who support specific pupils with intervention programmes. Importantly, senior leaders are becoming more proactive about leading their areas and are involved in planning appropriate actions. Action plans focus clearly on improving teaching and raising

pupils' attainment and have quantifiable criteria by which success can be measured. Systems for monitoring the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes have developed well but the school is still too reliant on external evaluation of its work. The skills of self-evaluation are still developing and assertions are not always backed by robust evidence of the impact of the school's work. Although there are appropriate plans to develop further the leadership roles of other staff, they are not yet involved in the process of self-evaluation.

There is scope to analyse further some of the anomalies that occur when performance data are presented in different ways and for senior leaders to support class teachers in analysing data to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Termly meetings to discuss the progress of individual pupils continue to be a powerful means of holding staff accountable for pupils' outcomes. Class teachers do not yet analyse their own data in preparation for these meetings.

Members of the interim executive board challenge the school's leaders appropriately about the impact of actions taken to improve the school. The shadow governing body will start to operate this term in preparation for resumption of delegated powers, as planned, in January 2012. As this happens, new governors will need to raise their profile with parents and carers to encourage parental involvement both in learning and in decision making in the school.

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

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

External support

Levels of support for areas of provision continue through links with other schools as well as through the work of consultants. The local authority's support plan is updated regularly to meet the schools' changing and emerging needs. The success of the external support can be seen in the growing confidence of senior leaders to provide direction to the school and in the increasing proportion of good-quality teaching.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that planned activities, both indoors and outdoors, in the Early Years Foundation Stage have sufficient breadth and scope to meet the needs of children with a wide range of abilities and experiences.
- Develop the subject leadership skills of other staff to involve them in the process of self-evaluation.
- Give class teachers, and support staff where appropriate, more involvement in analysing data to increase their accountability for the outcomes of pupils.