

9 October 2007

Miss S Bourn
The Interim Headteacher
St Mark's CofE Primary School
Franklyn Road
Godalming
GU7 2LD

Dear Miss Bourn

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARK'S CofE
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 27 September 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – *inadequate*

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – *inadequate*

Newly qualified teachers *may not be appointed*

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese of Guildford and the Executive Director for Children and Young People for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

R Kapadia
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST MARK'S CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 27 September 2007

Evidence

The inspector observed four of the five classes, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, some staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

There have been several staff changes since the last visit: three teachers have left and one new teacher has been appointed; other changes relate to maternity leave. The plans for a hard federation with another school have been shelved and replaced by a plan, subject to consultation, to close the school at the end of the year and re-open an infant school on the same site in September 2008. Numbers in the school have dropped by about a third to 104, so there are now five classes and some are now mixed age.

Achievement and standards

Standards in the school remain low, especially at Key Stage 1 and progress is slow. While there were improvements in some aspects of achievement during the summer term, there was also a decline in other aspects. There are a number of strategies in place for improvement during the autumn term.

At Key Stage 1 in 2007, under two thirds of pupils attained Level 2 in English and mathematics, with no pupils attaining Level 3. These are exceptionally low results compared with all schools nationally. Test results at Key Stage 2 rose in 2007 but remain below the national average, especially with regards to the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5. The percentages attaining Level 4 or above was 79%, 58% and 79% in English, mathematics and science respectively; these figures are well below the challenging and rather unrealistic targets set by the school. Results in writing were markedly lower than in reading.

The school has undertaken its own analysis of progress of its Year 6 pupils from Year 2. An analysis by gender has also been undertaken. This shows that while reasonable progress was made in reading and science, pupils' progress was slow in writing and mathematics.

The school has administered optional tests for junior pupils and analysed the results of pupils' performance in writing on various aspects such as composition, spelling or handwriting. Actions are now planned to address areas of weakness, while maintaining strengths such as sentence structure. This has led to specific writing targets aimed at children working at different levels. Data from the tests have been shared with staff, and targets devised to focus on areas of weakness. Ladders of progress have been established, but these are not analysed systematically to give an overview of progress in each year group in English and mathematics.

There are pupils who have been targeted for extra support, with an intervention programme, although the impact of this has yet to be evaluated. Lesson observations confirmed that standards remain low in mathematics and that a stronger emphasis on writing is needed, including opportunities for children to write in a range of contexts and for different purposes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science – *inadequate*

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being were judged satisfactory in the last inspection but there were issues over behaviour, which was added as another area for work to be undertaken.

Attendance remains much improved. In the last academic year the attendance rate was 94.3% and was 94% in the third week of this term, which is near the national average and meets the school's own internal targets. This improvement has been sustained because the school has carefully analysed the reasons for unsatisfactory attendance and has made sure that families understand the importance of children coming to school regularly. Good procedures are in place, whereby families receive two letters each term informing them about their child's attendance record and, where necessary, explaining areas of concern. Good liaison with outside agencies ensures that the school has a good understanding of the family circumstances which lead to irregular attendance and, where there are particular difficulties, for example over transport, these are dealt with effectively and sensitively. The importance of regular attendance continues to have a high profile with attendance competitions and in awarding prizes to classes and individuals with high attendance.

The level of exclusions has risen markedly with 16 in the summer term and 4 in the autumn term, including 3 on the day prior to this inspection. The reasons for the exclusions have yet to be analysed systematically. In order to address issues over behaviour, the first two weeks of term were devoted to a range of activities to help the newly formed mixed-age classes to gel together. There are plans for more consistency in behaviour management, with learning seats, listening skills, and systems for dealing with behavioural issues. These are now used regularly by teachers.

Some pupils show an immature attitude to their work and to each other. Although they usually do their best to respond to teachers' expectations, some lack the self-control to maintain appropriate behaviour and concentration for longer periods. They too quickly slip back into inattention, which distracts others in the group and slows the pace of learning in the class. This was confirmed in discussions with pupils, some of whom do not engage well with the range of activities offered in lessons over the week, and would prefer a longer lunch break. Playground games have been introduced and are proving successful.

A formal complaint about bullying and behaviour by a parent was received: evidence from this inspection indicates that some pupils also have some concerns about these issues. The school has not ensured that all complaints are logged carefully and acted upon systematically.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Encourage the pupils whose progress is affected by unsatisfactory attendance to come to school more regularly – *good*

Quality of provision

The proportion of good teaching in the school remains relatively low and there is also some unsatisfactory teaching. This is confirmed both by recent monitoring by the LA consultant, as well as in lessons observed during this inspection. Though there is a realistic picture of teaching in the school, limited improvements have yet been made since the summer term. This is partly because of staff changes, as well as classes which are now mixed-age, arising because of uncertainty over the future of the school.

In the best lessons, teachers elicit respect from pupils and set tasks well matched to differing needs, based on good knowledge of pupils' prior learning and progress. For example, a starter session gave different multiplication sums to groups of pupils, and brief records were kept to help to set individual targets for pupils. In the main activity, the underlying rationale for the work is shared confidently and links made to earlier work.

Where teaching is less confident, tasks are set but links between practical and written activities are sometimes not brought out clearly; for example, children were not encouraged to check an answer obtained with multi-cubes, with the answer obtained by a more formal method. At times, a whole class session lasts too long, resulting in some pupils being admonished.

Teachers have comprehensive working files to support them in their work. They have begun to plan work to meet more closely the needs of all pupils. In the best lessons, there are good relationships and pupils are learning to work with concentration and application. In inadequate lessons, although there are better techniques to manage behaviour, progress is still slow.

A regular system of assessment has been introduced to track pupils' progress using a range of measures including optional tests. A baseline has now been established from which the school can begin to track and gauge pupils' progress. Teachers have improved their knowledge of tracking and assessment; moderation has been used to make assessment more accurate. This is now being used in setting targets.

The curriculum is rather strongly balanced towards aural activities, rather than practical ones, with a strong emphasis on English; there is less time for mathematics and some foundation subjects. A curriculum grid has been produced to plan for the newly formed mixed age classes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Ensure that teaching helps pupils to make adequate progress in all lessons – *inadequate*

Leadership and management

The strategic plan, which addresses key issues for the school has been annotated to indicate the actions which have been taken. However, the key issue relating to long-term sustainability of the school has taken up much more time than anticipated and limited progress in other areas of the school's work. The proposal for a hard federation has caused concern, as well as some opposition, amongst parents, as has the recent decision by the LA to consult on the closure of the school.

The headteacher has undertaken regular monitoring of teaching and has provided support in literacy using a full time consultant who is working in the school during the autumn term. Some support is also planned for mathematics but not yet in science.

Though some progress has been made on the key issue relating to improving the senior staff's focus on the most urgent areas, the rate of progress has been slow. There are action plans for the core subjects, but more work is needed to make the necessary improvements. The subject coordinators value their role on the recently formed senior leadership team, but have had limited impact so far. There has been some analysis of pupils' progress in the core subjects. Further work has been undertaken in English to identify key areas requiring improvement, but not in mathematics and science.

A new chair of governors has been appointed and the governors have undertaken useful training on understanding data about the school's performance. They recognise their role to provide support for the school. They have yet to take on the role of holding the school to account, for example via its recently formed Standards Committee.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve the senior staff's focus on the most urgent areas, to speed up and sustain improvement – *inadequate*

External support

The LA has provided much support for the school and has now begun listing the actions taken more systematically. A consultant has now monitored teaching and formed a view which is broadly in line with this inspection. However, the LA has not evaluated the impact of its own support in helping the school address its key issues. A consultant has been assigned to work in the school for the autumn term on improving teaching and learning. It would be useful to evaluate the success of this support in the spring term. The LA holds regular meetings to discuss the school's progress. These are useful but do not always provide the underlying reasons for judgements made.

The LA recognises that its plans for a hard federation did not prove to be effective in helping the school to improve. The effects of its current plan to close the school and open an infant school on the premises also require careful consideration in terms of the long-term consequences for the quality of education in the area.

Consultant support has been planned for 2007-08 with the aim of removal of the school from special measures by July 2008: the support needs to address the key issue that the LA judged the school to have limited capacity to improve. The success measures are rather general and do not include specific targets to be achieved at various points during the year.

Priorities for further improvement

- Foster more self-controlled behaviour and mature attitudes amongst pupils to enable them to make faster progress in lessons.