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L Christie & D Eaton
The Interim Headteachers
St Mark's CofE Primary School
Franklyn Road
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Dear Headteachers

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

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 February 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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: 7 and 8 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed all the classes, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the interim headteachers, some staff, two groups of pupils, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

There have been a number of staff changes since the last visit, not least that the interim headteacher left at the end of the autumn term and has been replaced by two interim headteachers for the rest of the year; several new teachers and teaching assistants have been appointed. The governing body has been disbanded and replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB) this term.

The plan to close the school at the end of the year has been replaced by a radical realignment of the school, whereby it will cater for infant children only next year and build up other year groups subsequently. Numbers are stable at 100; there are seven classes in the mornings and four in the afternoons.

Achievement and standards

Standards in the school remain low and progress is slow, especially in Key Stage 1. There has been a decline in standards in the autumn term, but vigorous action is being taken in the first few weeks of the spring term. It is too early to see the impact of these changes.

Internal monitoring shows that under a quarter of Year 2 pupils are currently working at Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a stronger picture with regards to reading in Year 6, where almost three quarters are working at Level 4; however, under a quarter are currently working at Level 4 in mathematics and writing. Data has yet to be collated with regards to standards in science.

These low results are partly related to the high level of special needs in the school; these needs are sometimes related to behavioural issues, which are now being addressed. It is also recognised that assessments have not been carefully moderated in the past. As noted in the previous monitoring letter, uncertainties about the school's future led to a significant drop in numbers, but the roll has now been stabilised.

However, the school's current managers recognise that progress this year has been slow overall and well below the challenging targets set by the LA. Overall, about half the pupils have made satisfactory progress in the last few months in English and mathematics; about a tenth of pupils have regressed since last term. Records indicate that the most consistent progress has been made in Year 5.

There are appropriate plans in place to improve English and mathematics, with targets for these subjects displayed in the hall and classrooms for pupils in each year group. New resources have been ordered. Trackers have been established for each year group to show the progress made by each pupil since joining the school. There are also plans to provide systematic support for individual pupils by the use of teaching assistants and intervention groups. It is recognised that the mixed-age classes were not working well and there are now separate classes for most year groups in the mornings, when English and mathematics are taught. Assessment has been undertaken in science and plans for improvements will be made once the results have been analysed.

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

The level of attendance improved in the last academic year but has fluctuated this year. During the autumn term the attendance rate fell but has risen again in the spring term. The school's managers, with justification, attribute the variation to two factors - the uncertainty over its future and the unhappiness felt by some pupils over the wide age range in classes during the autumn term. The latter issue has been resolved and hard work has ensured that pupils and their families once more have a more positive view of the benefits of coming to school regularly. Overall attendance remains below the national average because it is adversely affected by low attendance in the Nursery. The attendance of school age pupils is in line with the national average, although there are still some significant variations between year groups which are being addressed.

The school's staff is working hard to deal with inappropriate and distracting behaviour consistently and firmly. There is a new approach to the way in which unacceptable behaviour is handled. Pupils are given fewer 'chances' before they are removed from the classroom to spend a short time under the direct supervision of one of the headteachers. Additionally, inconsiderate behaviour at lunchtime has been tackled by the introduction of more play equipment and a more equitable rota system to ensure that pupils from all years get a chance to engage in a range of supervised activities. This was introduced at the instigation of the pupils themselves through their representatives on the school council, although some of the older pupils are having difficulty in coming to terms with the way in which this impacts on their freedom of choice. Pupils, especially the younger ones, feel safer from bullying. The exclusion rate, which was high in both of the previous two terms but was not effective in improving behaviour, has fallen to zero since the start of the spring term.

Some pupils still find it difficult to exercise self control in their relations with others and lack the maturity necessary to cope in a positive way with life's inevitable setbacks and it is on such occasions that they allow resentment to grow. Pupils in Year 6 especially have been emotionally affected by the many changes which have taken place over the last two years. Their role in the life in the school is being enhanced by measures such as the introduction of a prefect system. It is too soon to judge accurately the full impact of these changes.

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 – satisfactory

Quality of provision

During the inspection all lessons showed some satisfactory features while only a few had some good features. Teachers have clear objectives for the learning to take place in lessons and these are explained to pupils, along with the criteria to be used in deciding if these have been met. In the more successful lessons, the criteria are clear, enabling pupils to begin to use them confidently; in some lessons they are too complex to be understood by all pupils.

Teachers make frequent use of directed questioning and discussion to enhance and evaluate progress but there is variation in the success with which this is done. In lessons where questioning is probing and offers an appropriate level of challenge it supports all pupils, but there are occasions when teachers do not match the questions to pupils' needs and do not target pupils who most need it. Similarly, although teachers generally plan their lessons in reasonable detail they do not plan success criteria, tasks and resources to meet the identified needs of pupils across the ability range. When this happens the work is too easy for some, while others find it too difficult.

The quality of marking of work is unsatisfactory. While the better marking gives good recognition of pupils success and hard work there is not enough specific advice about how they can improve. There are many examples of missed opportunities for providing this guidance to pupils. Because of this lack of clear advice pupils, including the older ones, have limited understanding of their next steps, which thereby limits their progress.

In order to improve behaviour in lessons and provide a supportive learning environment, teachers place emphasis on their behaviour expectations and guidelines. Pupils initially respond to this positively, but when behaviour standards begin to slip, some teachers ignore this for too long in order to get on with the lesson they have planned. This appears to pupils to signal to pupils that poor behaviour will be tolerated, when what is needed is a more rigorous response.

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 new interim joint headteachers started at the beginning of the spring term and have already had an impact in raising staff morale. A few teachers who had planned to resign have decided to stay in the school. Responsibilities in the school have been changed to build on staff expertise. A new acting deputy headteacher has been

appointed and the process of appointing subject leaders for the core areas is almost complete. There are signs of more urgency and collaboration amongst staff, including teaching assistants. For example, assessment of English work has been moderated and, in mathematics, a LA consultant has begun co-teaching to build on the joint planning already initiated.

Initially, the interim headteachers undertook a careful analysis of the school and correctly concluded that pupils' behaviour and the organisation of pupils into classes was having an adverse effect on teaching and learning. They immediately began weekly monitoring of teaching and sharing findings in a subsequent staff meeting. They have confirmed that teaching is satisfactory, but the LA target on the proportion of good lessons is not being achieved. This has led to the identification and shared understanding of the elements of a good lesson. Guided reading has been improved by a clear focus on key aspects.

The organisation of classes has been changed to avoid the need for a class with several age groups in the morning sessions. Pupils commented favourably on this change and their attendance has improved. A firmer approach is being taken to behaviour, yet the incidence of exclusions has been curtailed. Parents have not submitted any complaints about the school, as occurred prior to the previous inspection.

The action plan for raising attainment has four key themes, closely linked to the four key issues for action. The plan lists an appropriate range of actions, with responsibilities and success criteria; for some, brief notes have been made about the progress so far.

After a number of meetings last term and firm advice from the LA, the governing body has been disbanded and replaced with an IEB. Two members have been appointed so far and a few more are to be added. Early signs are that a professional, supportive relationship has been established, with a clear focus on enhancing the achievement of pupils across the school; a second task is to build capacity for the future.

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 – satisfactory

External support

The LA provided extensive support for the school, including one teacher for the autumn term with a focus on teaching and learning. Other consultants have also been involved in aspects such as English and mathematics, as well as support relating to behaviour and attendance. However, the impact of this support has been limited, partly due to problems identified over the school's leadership. This was evident in the adverse judgements made in regular meetings to discuss the school's progress, where evidence of continuing concerns has been discussed. Decisive action was taken during the autumn term, leading to the replacement of the interim headteacher by two joint headteachers, who have played a crucial role in helping

other schools in difficulties in the past few years. The LA has also sensibly set some milestones against which progress can be measured relating to the key issues. These should now be reviewed with the new leadership and used on a regular basis by the IEB, who also need to plan for the new proposals being implemented in September.

Priorities for further improvement

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