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Mr T Collins
The Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Burton Latimer
High Street
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NN15 5RL

Dear Mr Collins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Burton Latimer

Following my visit with Suzanne Gerred, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 January 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in July 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – 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 Director of the Children and Young People's Service for Northamptonshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Peterborough.

Yours sincerely

A P O'Malley
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the chair of governors and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. Of the 11 teachers observed during that inspection, only two remain. During the autumn term, supply or temporary teachers taught five of the nine classes. Subject managers for English, mathematics and science took up their posts in January 2009. The inspection in July 2008 asked the school to improve its curriculum. Working with the local authority, the school plans to begin addressing the issue this term. Consequently, the inspection team did not judge the progress made towards the curriculum improvement point on this visit.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in writing throughout the school, and in mathematics and science in Years 3 to 6, remains too low. The school has developed its systems to monitor progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science and closely analyses the data gathered. However, it acknowledges that some of the early assessment data against which progress is measured is unreliable. During the inspection, it became clear that there are also inconsistencies in the accuracy of current assessments in writing and in science.

Inspection evidence indicates that the progress made by individual pupils varies widely. Although there are pupils who are making good progress, too many pupils are making no progress or are regressing. The most significant underachievement is for pupils in Years 3, 5 and 6 in mathematics, in Years 5 and 6 in writing, and in Year 4 in science. Work recorded in pupils' books is of variable quality. Much of the work recorded in the autumn term, before the new permanent teachers took up their posts, provides further evidence of very limited progress for a significant proportion of pupils. There is evidence, however, of improving outcomes in these classes during the spring term. In science, a lack of challenge for the higher attainers is limiting their progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2008:

- improve pupils' achievement in writing throughout the school and in mathematics and science in Years 3 to 6 – inadequate.

Quality of provision

The high turnover of teaching staff following the last inspection has hindered efforts to establish effective teaching and learning throughout the school. There is, however, some evidence of good practice. For example, in a mathematics lesson all pupils made good progress in estimating and measuring angles because the work was pitched accurately to challenge different groups of pupils. Similarly, some of the youngest children in the school successfully developed their early writing skills because the teacher carefully used her knowledge of their earlier learning to plan precise learning objectives for the range of needs in the class. However, examples such as these were not typical of the teaching observed. There is not yet enough good teaching to accelerate the rate of progress of pupils in all year groups. During this visit, four out of the 12 lessons observed were inadequate. Science lessons were particularly weak because activities did not build upon previous learning. As a result, there was insufficient challenge for higher attainers whilst others struggled to grasp the concepts being taught. In one class, the measuring equipment provided for pupils investigating friction was ill matched to their poor mathematical skills. Not surprisingly, the readings pupils recorded were wildly inaccurate. In other lessons, there was evidence of weak subject knowledge and mundane activities that failed to fully engage pupils. Behaviour in lessons was at least satisfactory, but pupils tended to be compliant rather than enthusiastically engaged. Teaching assistants provide appropriate support for those pupils who need help with their learning.

The guidance pupils receive about their work has improved only very recently. Prior to the start of this term, marking was inadequate. Most teachers are now beginning to provide pupils with regular feedback and there are examples of good marking, where comments are full and informative in identifying pupils' next steps. In a minority of classes, pupils make thoughtful evaluations about how well they have met success criteria and teachers follow up these comments. Work recorded in the autumn term in many classes reveals low expectations and an inconsistent approach to presentation and to the correction of spelling errors, especially in subjects other than literacy. There are signs of higher expectations since January and that pupils are taking more pride in their work.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2008:

- improve teaching so that pupils' work matches their needs accurately and expectations of all pupils are higher, particularly for the more able – inadequate
- make sure pupils have the guidance they need to improve their work – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The senior leaders accept that provision and outcomes need to be much better and they are working hard to secure improvements. The high turnover of staff is testimony to their awareness of the need to challenge inadequate performance. The

school has developed a single action plan based on the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The planned actions are appropriate and the impact of these is evaluated regularly. Senior staff have developed a cycle for checking teaching and learning, and monitor closely how well pupils are progressing in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The headteacher, in particular, has observed a significant number of lessons since the last inspection. Where observations highlight areas for development, senior leaders and consultants from the local authority support and mentor relevant staff. However, from the inspection evidence, it is clear that these strategies have not had a sufficiently positive impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning or accelerating progress. This is because the lesson observations and book trawls conducted lack rigour and focus more on what teachers are doing rather than on the skills and knowledge pupils are learning. Teaching is much less effective than the school judges it to be. Moreover, because the accuracy of assessments used to track pupils' progress is not secure, time spent gathering and analysing data is of little value.

The recently appointed subject leaders in English, mathematics and science have had very limited opportunities to contribute to the school's efforts to drive up standards. They are finalising action plans to develop their own subjects and are already undertaking appropriate activities. However, the impact of this work on improving learning in the classroom is at a very early stage.

The governing body is developing its role in supporting and challenging the school. The chair is part of the task group that meets every six weeks to consider reports on the impact of actions taken. However, for all governors to be able to fulfil their roles more thoroughly, the information they receive about the school's performance needs to represent more accurately the school's current effectiveness.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2008:

- improve leadership and management so that every teacher is held to account regarding pupils' progress and that leaders at all levels drive school improvement more urgently – inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory and it has identified an appropriate range of actions to help the school. For example, the authority's literacy and numeracy advisory staff have been working intensively with some teachers and, more recently, with the newly appointed subject leaders. The school particularly values support provided in literacy and has evidence of improved progress in phonics and writing as positive outcomes of this support. However, the school's staffing difficulties throughout the autumn term have meant that, despite targeting additional resources to assist the school, the support from the local authority has had limited impact on progress towards the improvement points. For example, the local authority statement of action explicitly identifies that all the teaching should be at least satisfactory by now and that half should be good or better. However,

inadequate teaching remains and only three out of 12 lessons observed were of good quality.