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Mrs Sue Fernyhough  
St Matthew's CofE School  
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Wigton  
Cumbria  
CA7 3NT

Dear Mrs Fernyhough

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Matthew's CofE School

Following my visit to your school on 3 - 4 June 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 January 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Angela Milner  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St Matthew's CofE School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3 – 4 June 2009

## Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority.

## Context

Since the January 2009 inspection there have been a number of changes in staffing in the Key Stage 2 class. Booster support has been provided to help pupils prepare for end of key stage tests. Since the summer half-term break, the Key Stage 2 class, has been taught jointly by a local authority consultant and the acting headteacher. The governing body has co-opted a new member with specific expertise in assessment information to help with the monitoring of pupils' progress.

Support from a local partner school has been provided and this will continue during the next academic year.

## Achievement and standards

Standards are broadly average. Inspection evidence confirms that current progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1 is satisfactory overall. Progress remains inadequate at Key Stage 2 as too few pupils currently make enough progress overall in relation to their starting points to achieve the expected levels for their age. The school's targets for Key Stage 2 pupils in 2009 are unlikely to be met because of the gap between expected levels and current attainment as a result of previous underachievement.

There are early signs of improvement. However, much of this improvement is attributable to very recent improvements in the quality of teaching and the closer monitoring of pupils' progress. The positive impact of the school's efforts to accelerate pupils' progress can be seen in pupils' work in lessons and in their books. School leaders have put in place reliable assessment procedures and new systems for target-setting and for tracking pupils' progress. These provide evidence that the rate at which pupils make progress is increasing in both classes as teaching and learning strategies have been matched better to meet individual pupils' needs. However, the legacy of underachievement and the low levels of pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy mean that pupils are not making the progress they should, particularly in Key Stage 2 and in reading at Key Stage 1. More rapid gains are required in learning to ensure pupils catch up and reach the standards they are capable of achieving.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2009:

- Improve pupils' progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science  
- inadequate

### Personal development and well-being

The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to learning and form good relationships with adults and each other. They behave well in and out of class and generally work and play happily together. The school has undertaken work to improve pupils' self-esteem and help them to value learning more. Pupils particularly enjoy the opportunities provided in 'golden time' on Friday afternoons.

Pupils who met the inspector were very positive about the school and the support they receive from the adults who work there. They expressed their views about how the school had improved since the last inspection. Pupils talked about the improvements made to the building and the quality of their learning environment. They identified that new information and communication technology (ICT) equipment was helping them to learn better. One pupil explained, 'Work is now more interesting but harder.' Others identified their appreciation of the broader range of learning experiences, including the use of practical activities, and what they had learned from visitors and visits out of school.

Attendance remains above the national average and no pupils have left the school since the last inspection.

### Quality of provision

Staff development, supported by the local authority is helping to tackle weaker elements of provision. Audits of the quality of teaching and learning undertaken by the acting headteacher, colleagues from the partner school and the local authority have identified the need to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the Key Stage 2 class to ensure pupils make greater progress. Effective planning and team teaching by the local authority consultant and acting headteacher, since the summer half-term break, are providing a more consistent approach to teaching and learning for the older pupils and ensuring that pupils are more challenged and interested. Well-taught lessons with tasks informed by detailed assessment of individual capabilities are identifying gaps in pupils' learning and basic skills. During the visit the inspector observed no inadequate teaching. Progress in lessons was judged to be satisfactory. Although most of the teaching was good, teachers are not always using assessment information to tailor plans sufficiently well to meet the needs of all pupils. Much work has been done to improve the learning environment and pupils' access to ICT. Electronic whiteboards are used effectively to stimulate learning. Relationships in lessons are positive and behaviour is good.

With the support of the local authority, work has been carried out to bring greater accuracy to assessment. School information now identifies pupils who are underachieving and as a result teachers' expectations are beginning to rise.

Teachers are beginning to use this information to match work to pupils' needs and provide suitable challenge.

The increased focus on the use of learning objectives, improvements to the learning environment and introduction of techniques for assessing learning are making learning more relevant and meaningful. Pupils are given opportunities to explain their learning and thinking through the use of 'talking partners' and are beginning to assess their own work. Teaching is more focused on pupils' needs and makes greater use of short well paced discussions to check on learning in lessons. Relevant and motivating practical activities rather than worksheets are used to ensure activities are interesting and meaningful. There has been a noticeable difference in the amount of problem-solving activities undertaken in science and mathematics to aid the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

The curriculum is increasingly meeting the needs of pupils as teachers make better use of assessment information to help them plan differentiated learning activities and evaluate how well pupils are making progress. Revisions have been made to the four year curriculum programme at Key Stage 2. Greater use is being made of visits and visitors to broaden the curriculum. Increasingly, activities recognise the need to enhance the development of pupils' skills. Local authority advice has been used to assist with plans to ensure there is an appropriate cultural dimension to the curriculum.

Pupils are well cared for and supported. As a result of identifying underachievement additional support has been put in place to boost progress in Key Stage 2 and better use is being made of a number of appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions throughout the school. It is too early to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Targets for literacy and numeracy are in place for every pupil. These are based on an accurate assessment of pupils' progress. Pupils are increasingly aware of their learning targets and what they have achieved but they are not all aware of their next steps in learning and how to achieve them. Pupils' work is marked regularly and feedback to pupils had improved since the last inspection as a result of the adoption of an effective draft assessment policy. Marking praises pupils for their work and confirms what has been achieved. The best examples give clear guidance on how to improve. The marking and levelling of pupils' work in writing is now good. Detailed writing records provide a useful tracking system to enable teachers to monitor gains in pupils' progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2009:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils are challenged, interested and make more rapid progress – satisfactory
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and broadens their understanding of diversity in British society – satisfactory

- Improve the use of target-setting, marking and tracking pupils' achievements so that pupils know the progress they are making and what they need to do next – satisfactory

### Leadership and management

The acting headteacher and chair of governors are working hard to lay good foundations for school improvement. Currently, this is reliant to an extent on the support of the local authority, its consultants and the partner school. School self-evaluation accurately identifies stronger and weaker aspects of practice. There is a good understanding of what needs to change and the school is appreciative of the help and support they have received on how to secure the necessary improvements. The school's improvement plan clearly focuses on the key areas for improvement. The format is well matched to the local authority's support plan and identifies responsibilities, timescales and success criteria. Although it establishes what needs to be achieved it does not indicate the action steps which will be taken to achieve its strategic intentions. This makes it difficult to measure progress and achievements.

The checking and evaluation of improvement strategies has begun. The quality of teaching and learning is being effectively monitored to ensure there is a sufficient focus on the amount of challenge in lessons and that teachers are using assessment information to plan activities that match pupils' different ages and abilities. There is a recognition that consistently strong teaching is required to accelerate the rate of learning so that progress made is good enough to overcome the legacy of past underachievement.

The governing body has undertaken training and development activities to ensure that governors have a better understanding of their role in providing challenge and monitoring the effectiveness of the school. They are working well as a team to make better use of the available expertise and to increase the effectiveness of the existing committee structure. The governors are focused on the need to ensure policies are regularly reviewed and to tackle existing staffing and budget issues. Pairs of governors have taken responsibility for monitoring each of the five areas identified for improvement in the last inspection report and reporting back on progress to the school specific monitoring group.

All of the stakeholders involved share a common sense of purpose and are working well together to move the school forwards.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2009:

- Improve leadership and management at all levels so the school has a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses and what it has to do to improve – satisfactory

### External support

The school is receiving a high level of support and guidance from the local authority, which had been monitoring the school since 2006 due to concerns about standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Additional support was provided and a school specific monitoring group, consisting of local authority and diocesan personnel, the acting headteacher and governors, was established in advance of the last inspection. The local authority was, therefore, well prepared to produce a statement of action and put support plans in place with the full cooperation of the school. A realistic date of summer 2010 has been set for the removal of special measures. There are clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken through the work of the school specific monitoring group and termly verification activities undertaken by two independent local authority officers.

The levels of support provided have been further enhanced since the last inspection. Extensive, well-targeted support from the local authority has included focused staff development activities, audits of the quality of teaching and learning and help with specific issues facing the school, for example, the broadening children's understanding of diversity in British society. Local authority consultants have worked particularly effectively with the acting headteacher to gain an accurate picture of standards and progress and to improve teachers' planning and assessment skills and the quality of teaching and learning. The acting headteacher has also received support with improvement planning. Governors have received training to improve their understanding of their role in monitoring and evaluation, with human resource issues and to develop a workable solution to the financial deficit budget.

Expertise from colleagues in a partner school, including that of a National Leader in Education, has been available and this support will continue throughout the next academic year.

The impact of external support is evident and is starting to lead to more rapid improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the progress pupils make in their learning. The current effective deployment of a local consultant for three days a week in the school is ensuring pupils in Key Stage 2 make more rapid progress and that consultant support from the local authority focuses on meeting the school's needs and developing capacity within the school.

#### Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue its work on the priorities identified in the January 2009 inspection.