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9 October 2009

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

Dear Mr Collins

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

Following my visit with Gillian Scobie, additional inspector, to your school on 7–8 October 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 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

Anthony O'Malley  
H M Inspector



## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST MARY'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 7–8 October 2009

## Evidence

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

## Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the number of classes has reduced from nine to seven. There are now no mixed-age classes in the school. One teacher has left the school and a recently appointed teacher works in Year 6. A temporary teacher is currently covering for a teacher on maternity leave.

## Achievement and standards

The children who started the Reception class in September have the skills and knowledge expected for children of that age. The personal, social and emotional development of these children has been an area of relative weakness in the past. Improvements made to the outside learning environment, since the previous inspection, provide much better opportunities for the children to develop these skills through adult directed learning and through activities the children choose for themselves.

There have been no formal assessments of the achievement and standards of pupils in Years 1 to 6 since the previous visit. However, the school has received data showing that the pupils who took the national tests at the end of Year 6 in May 2009 attained considerably higher standards than in recent years. In science, all pupils attained or exceeded the expected level. In English, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level was above the national average. In mathematics, results were close to the national average, and the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level rose from 51% to 79%. The accelerated progress made by the pupils during their final year in the school meant that their overall progress throughout Key Stage 2 was satisfactory.

Evidence from observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work shows that, although more pupils are now making better progress, in some year groups the legacy of underachievement is proving hard to remedy. This is particularly an issue for the current Year 6 pupils where the standard of the pupils' work continues to reflect inadequate provision and unstable staffing in the past.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

## Provision

Pupils made good progress in six of the 11 lessons observed. This is a satisfactory improvement on the quality of teaching observed during the previous visit. In the Reception class, adults use the improved opportunities for learning outside the classroom to teach important skills and to promote imaginative activities that the children themselves can organise. Often these activities maintain the children's interest and help them to learn important social and emotional skills and to develop knowledge in other areas of learning. For example, a group of children used large pieces of cardboard to build a slide and then took turns to try out their toy. Both boys and girls chatted and laughed as they played and made changes to the angle or height of their slide to increase the fun.

Teachers throughout the school increasingly plan well to meet the needs of more able pupils. Lesson observations and work in the pupils' books show that this group now regularly receive challenging activities because teachers are aware of the need to accelerate their progress. For example, in a handling data lesson the highest attainers worked with enthusiasm at open-ended tasks that gave them opportunities to solve problems and to set problems for their peers. The work was enjoyable, creative and developed reasoning skills. There remains, however, a relatively high proportion of satisfactory teaching and this means that too many pupils, who are working below age related expectations, are not closing the gap rapidly enough. A number of factors continue to act as barriers to better progress. Teachers sometimes use time inefficiently, for example, through the lengthy administration of spelling tests. On other occasions, teachers set tasks that focus too much on consolidating knowledge rather than promoting new learning. Finally, in a small minority of classes, expectations are too low and pupils receive praise for work that is untidy, unfinished or contains basic errors.

The previous report noted how the curriculum promoted more active and independent learning in science and mathematics. Good progress is continuing in this area. The high quality displays around the school provide clear evidence of how well planned connections between subjects increase the interest and relevance of the curriculum for pupils. For example, work in science, design technology, literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology successfully promotes the pupils' understanding of class topics on the Great Fire of London, Britain since 1930 and the Ancient Egyptians. Strong links with the local community also enrich the curriculum and events like the 'evacuation' to Burton Latimer Hall are adding greatly to the pupils' enjoyment of their learning.

The focus on improving the quality of marking in all subjects has been effective. Teachers frequently provide pupils with helpful development points. In the majority of classes, pupils respond well to this guidance and they are making better progress. There are increasing examples of pupils evaluating their own work and that of their peers. The pleasing results in the most recent Year 6 national tests show the benefit of the rigorous new systems for assessing how well pupils are learning. For example, in science, very thorough assessments identified precisely any gaps in individual pupil's knowledge. These assessments led to the additional, and sometimes one-to-one, support that enabled all pupils to achieve well.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve teaching so that pupils' work matches their needs accurately and expectations of all pupils are higher, particularly for the more able – satisfactory
- develop the curriculum so that it stimulates more active and independent learning challenges all pupils more – good
- make sure pupils have the guidance they need to improve their work – good

### Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to give a strong drive to school improvement through their high expectations of both staff and pupils. For example, the headteacher now holds one-to-one meetings with teachers every three weeks to discuss pupil progress and to give teachers opportunities to share their reflections on their practice. They have an accurate view of the quality of teaching based on their lesson observations. Subject leaders in English, mathematics and science now contribute well to the school's efforts to drive up standards. Since the previous inspection, they have carried out detailed analyses of pupils' progress in their subjects and drawn up action plans that focus on pupil outcomes. These plans identify specific actions that will help the school to meet challenging targets. It is too early to measure the impact of these plans. However, it is clear through their ability to lead training sessions, carry out lesson observations and conduct scrutinies of planning and pupils' work that these subject leaders are committed to driving up standards and are ready to hold colleagues to account for pupils' progress.

Governors continue to monitor carefully the progress the school is making. Through the Core Subject Action Groups, governors have opportunities to visit classrooms, meet pupils and discuss issues with subject leaders and teachers. These activities ensure they have an accurate understanding of how well the school is responding to the improvements points identified in the inspection of July 2008.

Prior to the inspection, 52 parents completed confidential questionnaires. Forty-eight of these were fully supportive of the school's leadership and management and a number commented positively on recent school improvements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 - good

#### External support

The local authority has reviewed its support for the school in response to the increasing capacity of the school's own leadership and management team. It continues to work closely with school leaders and keeps a watchful eye on all aspects of the school's performance. The school values the support it has received to help improve practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in English, mathematics and science. However, the main focus of the local authority's work this school year is on helping to secure good teaching in all classes. This work is at an early stage and at present, has had a satisfactory impact.