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Mrs M Cunningham
Associate Headteacher
St Margaret Mary's RC Primary School
St Margaret's Road
New Moston
Manchester
M40 0JE

Dear Mrs Cunningham

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Margaret Mary's RC Primary School

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt, additional inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 November 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Margaret Mary's RC Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the associate headteacher; staff with leadership responsibilities; pupils; and representatives of the Interim Executive Board, the local authority and Greater Manchester Challenge.

Context

The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board which held its first meeting in October 2009. The headteacher is unwell and absent from duty. Since mid-November, an associate headteacher has been at the school for four days a week and is due to work with the school at least until Easter 2010.

At the time of this monitoring visit, the Year 6 pupils and their teacher were away from school on an educational visit and the Year 5 teacher was absent.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The results of the unvalidated national tests and assessments in 2009 show a decline in Key Stages 1 and 2 and attainment is still too low, particularly for boys. At Key Stage 2, overall attainment was significantly below the national figures and the validated national average in 2008. The results mask a gender difference. Girls slightly exceeded the national figure but the boys' attainment was very low, almost a year behind the national figure for boys. At Key Stage 1 attainment was low in reading, writing and mathematics. Girls and boys did less well than the national picture but, again, boys were further behind. Only in mathematics did boys not lag behind girls. In writing, boys' attainment was nearly four terms behind what boys achieved nationally in 2008. The school's records of pupils' attainment and progress show a significant number of pupils whose attainment has stood still or regressed.

Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They want to achieve well. They like having targets to work towards and they try hard at the work set for them. They appreciate it when teachers help them learn from their mistakes. They like being actively involved in full class sessions, for instance, writing their answers on individual whiteboards which they hold up for the teacher to check.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science – inadequate.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are well-behaved in lessons and around the school. Nonetheless, when teaching is dull, some pupils become inattentive. The attendance rate remains broadly average.

The effectiveness of provision

There is not enough good teaching to achieve the accelerated progress necessary for pupils to recover lost ground and to raise attainment. The teaching seen during the monitoring inspection varied from good to inadequate, with the less effective teaching concentrated in Key Stage 1.

In the well-taught lessons:

- the teaching took good account of how well pupils had grasped previous work
- teachers used question and answer sessions well, involving all pupils, checking understanding and moving it on with open ended and probing questions
- work was tailored well to pupils' different learning needs
- teachers moved along at a brisk pace that kept all pupils on their toes
- support staff worked effectively with small groups of pupils in class focusing on helping them understand the work.

For the most part, the weaknesses in teaching noted at the last inspection are still present. Too often teachers are not sufficiently clear about where pupils are up to and do not provide suitably demanding work for all pupils.

In the weakest lessons:

- the teaching missed too many pupils, who, consequently, became inattentive
- pupils were not motivated by the lesson content, for example, when they had too little choice of subject matter for writing
- pupils were required to spend too long sitting listening to the teacher before being allowed to get down to their work
- lower attaining pupils spent too little time on activities that would move their learning on, for instance, drawing when they needed to push on with writing
- staff emphasised completion of tasks rather than learning
- work was not explained to pupils sufficiently clearly
- support staff were not deployed effectively.

The marking of pupils' work has improved but is not consistent across classes and subjects. It is generally better in English than in mathematics and science. Teachers usually indicate whether pupils have understood the main points in the lesson and they praise good work. Often they point out how pupils could improve their work. Marking surgeries provide in-depth feedback to pupils. Pupils are involved in evaluating each other's work and their comments are often perceptive with clear and appropriate pointers for improvement.



Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the consistency of teaching and learning, particularly in Key Stage 1 – inadequate
- improve guidance for pupils on how to improve their work – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The associate headteacher and Interim Executive Board have not been in place long enough to make a measurable difference to the school's effectiveness. That said, they show a high level of commitment to improving the school and they recognise the urgency and extent of that task. They have made a good start on identifying precisely where improvement is needed. Consequently, there is potential to move the school forward. There is no substantive deputy headteacher, though the acting deputy headteacher is supporting the associate headteacher. The leadership and management of subjects and key stages have not led to identifiable improvement since the last inspection. The school's 'post-Ofsted action plan' was not sufficiently sharply focused to steer improvement. The associate headteacher has produced an adequate short-term action plan to take the school to the end of the current term. She and the Interim Executive Board recognise that this plan will require review and development in order to underpin the longer-term drive for improvement.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are not all secure and the school's systems for checking pupils' progress are not robust enough to enable teachers and the management to ensure, term by term, that pupils are on track to attain as well as they should by the end of each key stage. As a result the process of target setting and monitoring is still not effective.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure pupils make at least satisfactory progress by setting more rigorous targets and monitoring pupils' progress towards them – inadequate
- improve the accuracy of school self-evaluation by leaders and managers in order to take more effective action to tackle weaknesses – inadequate.

External support

To date the local authority has been the main source of external support for the school. It provided staff time, including an advanced skills teacher who focused on Key Stage 1, but this has had limited impact on the quality of teaching. Plans for the future deployment of the advanced skills teacher currently working in the school include a substantial class teaching responsibility in Key Stage 2, with limited time allocated to supporting improvement in teaching across the school. The local



authority has supported the establishment of the recently-formed Interim Executive Board. This board also has the services of a consultant from the Greater Manchester Challenge who has a good initial picture of where improvement is needed. Links with the Greater Manchester Challenge have secured additional funds for the school. The local authority has yet to provide a statement of action that meets requirements. Following the last inspection, the local authority produced the required statement of action. On evaluation by HMI, the plan was judged to need amendment. An amended plan was provided at this inspection but it was not of an adequate quality.

Priorities for further improvement

The school and the local authority must tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection with greater urgency. In particular they should:

- improve teaching in Key Stage 1 so it is all of at least a satisfactory quality
- accelerate the rate of progress for pupils who are underachieving by:
 - tackling boys' underachievement across the core subjects in both key stages
 - ensuring that all teachers can assess pupils' attainment accurately against the levels of the National Curriculum
 - establishing a manageable system for keeping a close check on whether all pupils are achieving as well as they should
 - providing carefully planned work in lessons that meets pupils' varied needs and moves all pupils on in their learning
 - intervening promptly to support pupils who are not making the progress they should.
- strengthen leadership capacity by:
 - appointing a substantive deputy headteacher
 - improving middle management.