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Mrs Gerida Montague  
Partnership headteacher  
Sinclair Primary and Nursery School  
Sinclair Road  
Lords Hill  
Southampton  
SO16 8GF

Dear Mrs Montague

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sinclair Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit with Peter Thrussell, additional inspector, to your school on 13–14 January 2010, 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 June 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

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 the Interim Executive Board, and the Executive Director for Children's Services and Learning for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson

Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Sinclair Primary and Nursery School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 13–14 January 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the partnership headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, the chair of the interim executive board and a senior inspector from the local authority.

## Context

The substantive headteacher went on sick leave during the inspection and resigned in August 2009. Within a few weeks of the inspection, the local authority seconded the headteacher of Holy Family Catholic Primary School to take on the role of partnership headteacher as leader of both schools. A programme of support from the senior staff and teachers from the partnership school was also set up, and each teacher from Sinclair Primary linked to a teacher from Holy Family. The deputy headteacher, who was acting deputy at the time of the inspection, was appointed to the substantive post during the autumn term. The local authority opted to replace the school's governing body with an Interim Executive Board, which was formally established in November 2009. From the beginning of the autumn term, the classes were reorganised into single-age classes. The Nursery teacher has been seconded from the local authority for one year in the first instance. Two teachers are on temporary contracts. The local authority is in the early stages of considering the longer-term options to secure the future stability of the school.

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

Since the inspection, the unvalidated national test results have been published. These show the low standards at Year 2 declined further in 2009 and were significantly below average in reading, writing and mathematics. Too few pupils achieved the higher Level 3. Standards showed some improvement at Year 6, albeit from a very low point. Nonetheless, here too, attainment remains significantly below average overall and particularly in English and science where, again, too few pupils reached the higher Level 5. The picture was more positive in mathematics where standards rose to broadly average and a greater proportion of pupils attained the higher level. At both Year 2 and Year 6, there were marked differences in the performance of groups. Boys performed less well than girls in all subjects and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities fell well short of the national figures for this group. The school's analysis confirms this and shows that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made slow progress last year in most classes.

The partnership headteacher acted quickly to assess pupils at the end of last term and this has provided a secure baseline on which to judge pupils' future progress. A system of regular assessments in reading, writing and mathematics has been established, to check on each pupil's progress from term to term and to establish how well they are doing in relation to their individual end-of-year targets.

The assessments carried out towards the end of November show pupils' progress is already beginning to pick up, and some pupils have made rapid progress in the 10 weeks since the beginning of September. For example, clear progress has been made in writing in Years 5 and 6 and in mathematics in Years 1 and 5. In many ways, the school is further ahead in turning around pupils' achievement than is often the case by the first monitoring visit and a good start has been made in addressing the legacy of underachievement from the past. Nevertheless, there is further to go to sustain this good start and pupils' progress is by no means consistent across the school. In all classes, there are pupils who need to make better progress. The most serious issues are in Year 3. This class has had four changes of teacher since the beginning of this academic year, which has disrupted their learning and progress. Assessments from this class show too many pupils have stalled in their learning and need to make up ground quickly if they are to achieve their end-of-year targets.

In lessons, pupils' learning was at least satisfactory during the monitoring visit and at times better than this. More is being expected of them than has been the case in the past and pupils are rising well to the higher expectations and the teachers' shared determination that they will catch up. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to identify the specific gaps in individual pupils' knowledge and understanding so that teaching can pinpoint and remedy these weaknesses. Pupils' targets are also in need of review because, while some have a long way to go to reach their end-of-year targets, for others they are within easy reach, and a few have already reached their targets. This means that, for some pupils, the targets they were set in the past are not sufficiently challenging.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, particularly writing, in mathematics and in science in Key Stage 2 – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' positive attitudes to their learning and good behaviour are factors in their improving progress. They work hard in lessons and are very responsive to teachers' requests, for example when moving from tables to carpet, sharing ideas with a partner, or gathering resources. Several pupils told inspectors how the school had improved since the last inspection and how they appreciated the additional support that is being provided by their teachers and those who visit from Holy Family. The partnership headteacher has strengthened communication and relationships with parents and carers. They are being encouraged to ensure their children attend



school regularly and good systems are now in place to monitor and promote attendance. However, the steps have not yet had time to show an improvement on the attendance figures. They fell in 2008/09, from the previous year, and the figures for the autumn term are similar.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve rates of attendance and continue to emphasise to parents the negative impact that absence from school has on their child's progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection and teaching ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Teachers' relationships and rapport with pupils continue to be good. A rigorous focus on encouraging high-quality teaching is already having some impact and the school has made a good start in this respect. The systematic and focused support, through the partnership with Holy Family, has helped to improve teachers' awareness of the levels at which pupils should be working. Staff moderate assessments as a team across both schools, for example, and regularly compare work from the two schools. This is building teachers' confidence, ensuring that assessments are secure and reliable and, importantly, raising teachers' expectations. In many lessons there was greater consistency to the teaching and a palpable sense of urgency and pace to learning. All teachers share with pupils exactly what they are going to learn and encourage them to think about how well they are learning during the lesson. This is a common thread to the teaching which now runs across the school. The way teachers use questions is improving. The parts of lessons when teachers teach the whole class, however, are often too directed by the teachers, limiting opportunities for pupils to speak, answer at more length than just a single word or short phrase, or to explain their thinking. General questions tend to be asked of the whole class rather than balancing this with more targeted questions, for individuals or groups of pupils, that are specifically related to their level of understanding and needs. The impact of teaching assistants is inconsistent. Some very effective practice occurs but this is contrasted by times when teaching assistants are too passive or concentrate more on making sure pupils are doing what they have been asked to do rather than interacting with them and making a difference to their actual learning.

Teachers' planning has improved considerably since the last inspection, when it was not catering well enough for pupils' varying abilities. The school has benefited from using planning from the partnership school and this is being adapted appropriately in most cases. However, some planning lacks the precision necessary to accelerate pupils' learning because it does not yet take sufficient account of the specific gaps in individual pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. Similarly, tasks do not always take account of the aptitudes of pupils with special educational needs and/or



disabilities and the different approaches that help them to learn best. As a result, learning for this group of pupils becomes too reliant upon their having adult support.

The school has rightly placed high priority on improving progress in English and mathematics but, alongside this, leaders and teachers have also developed the wider curriculum. The range of subjects being taught and regularly timetabled is broader than it was at the time of the inspection. The pupils themselves recognise this and report that this is adding to their enjoyment and interest.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Ensure that teachers across the school raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve, plan work to meet their differing needs and challenge them fully in lessons – good.
- Improve the curriculum by teaching subjects besides English and mathematics in greater depth – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The partnership headteacher has provided astute, clear and highly focused leadership for the school at a time when staff were feeling very vulnerable. She has very quickly gained the trust, support and respect of staff. They feel guided and energised and morale is very high. All those who met with inspectors confirmed there had been no loss of momentum since the inspection and that this was down to the leadership and support received through the partnership with Holy Family and the relentless focus on pupils' improved progress. Any sense of isolation has been averted because the links with Holy Family were quickly established and, as a result, staff now feel a part of a larger team. In particular, teachers have welcomed the reorganised class structure which has helped them to focus on one year group.

Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been improved considerably. There is now an effective system in place, which teachers find manageable and helpful, and which is being used consistently. This shows at a glance any pupils who are not making enough progress. Teachers appreciate that they can enter their own data and information from assessments and find it has given them a more detailed picture on each pupil's progress. Alongside the increased emphasis on pupils' learning and progress, the partnership headteacher has set up a robust approach for monitoring teaching and learning and her written reports following lesson observations are appropriately detailed and evaluative.

The school gained permission from Ofsted to appoint a newly qualified teacher (NQT) for this academic year. The track record of Holy Family in supporting teachers in their first year of teaching was taken into account. The quality and breadth of NQT support was explored during this visit and arrangements for mentoring were found to be robust and effective.



The improvements that were required at the last inspection are underpinned by two key documents: the school's strategic plan and the local authority's action plan. While both of these focus on the specified key areas from the inspection report, the stated criteria, used to check how successfully the school is improving, are not aligned sufficiently. There are also some inconsistencies between the two documents. In addition, in the school's strategic plan, the timescale for actions is not sufficiently precise, making it difficult for members of the Interim Executive Board, for example, to hold the school to account.

The Interim Executive Board was formally established in October 2009, although members met prior to this on an informal basis. Although still at a relatively early stage in its existence, the new chair has valuable experience of supporting schools causing concern and is ensuring meetings maintain a clear focus on the areas for improvement.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that all leaders understand fully both the urgency with which standards and achievement need to be raised and their roles in bringing about improvements – good.
- Take immediate and effective action to ensure that initiatives are implemented consistently and monitor the outcomes rigorously – good.

External support

The local authority was quick to respond to the judgement that the school required special measures and set up the partnership with Holy Family promptly. Support provided by the local authority has been effectively targeted and managed well, in tandem with the support received through the partnership school. This has ensured that the programme of support as a whole has been appropriately tailored and that the local authority's and partnership school's work has been complementary. The local authority's senior inspector has kept in close touch with the school during the autumn term and last term's report from the school improvement partner is evaluative and helpful to the school's further improvement. However, not all reports from the local authority have been sufficiently incisive and submitted promptly to the school and Interim Executive Board, to help sustain and promote improvement.