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Mrs K Keiran
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Keiran

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Margaret's CofE Junior
Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit with Lesley Clark, additional inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 March 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 October 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.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Oldham and the Diocese of Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Brenda McIntosh

Lead inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Margaret's CofE Junior Infant and Nursery School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work. They visited 12 lessons and a number of guided reading and phonic sessions, looked at pupils' work and held discussions with two groups of pupils and listened to them read. They also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, key staff, a group of governors, the National Leader in Education and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school is in the midst of building work. Since the last inspection the Reception class has moved to new purpose-built accommodation which also currently houses the mixed Reception Year/Year 1 class. On completion of a further new extension the Nursery class will eventually be housed in the same accommodation as the Reception class. In December 2009, a senior teacher retired and this allowed the school to temporarily fill the post with a new assistant headteacher with effect from January 2010. The deputy headteacher returned from maternity leave in January 2010. At the same time the school appointed a second assistant headteacher on secondment from another school until the end of the summer term 2010. A staffing restructure is planned to take place in the summer term 2010. Two additional governors have been appointed; one from the local authority and one from the Diocese. The Year 2 teacher has resigned and leaves at the end of the spring term 2010. Arrangements are in place to cover the Year 2 class for the summer term. The Principal Primary Adviser for the local authority is the new School Improvement Partner.

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

Results of the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 showed an improvement in English but they were still significantly below average. The improvement was as a result of an increased number of pupils attaining the higher Level 5. The results in writing improved due to the school's focus on this area but there was quite a dip in the number of pupils reaching Level 4 in reading. Since the last inspection there has been particular success in accelerating pupils' progress in reading across the whole school. This is due to improved daily guided reading sessions, better organisation of resources, and closer monitoring of pupils' progress. There are also more regular opportunities for pupils to read individually to an adult in school and at home. All this has led to a renewed enthusiasm for reading. Parents, too, are playing their part in helping to raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress. Learning was enjoyable and productive in the guided reading sessions observed during this inspection. Pupils' enjoyment of reading has improved significantly since the last inspection.



They say they read more both at home and at school and read a wider variety of texts. They are proud of their progress and read out loud with increasing levels of confidence whether to an individual or in front of the whole class. Pupils have a better understanding of the levels they are working at and the progress they are making and this inspires them to do better. The increased emphasis on reading is helping to improve attainment and progress in writing. Year 6 pupils say they improve their writing by adding in good descriptions and words that they find from their reading books. In some classes there are noticeable improvements in the quality of pupils' writing as the marking becomes increasingly effective and more helpful to pupils. However, there are instances where progress in English is not as good and pupils' make repeated mistakes with spelling and punctuation. There is less progress in developing pupils' handwriting and general presentation in their books across the school.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise attainment in English – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils continue to behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils report positively about the changes in reading and Year 6 pupils take their responsibility as 'buddy readers' to younger pupils very seriously. They make very mature comments in the reading recording books and are using their skills well to help others improve.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching remains too variable in quality across the school particularly in the pace of learning and the way the activities for different groups of pupils are matched to their needs. Teachers are inconsistent in the way they use assessments of what pupils can do in planning lessons that ensure all groups of pupils accelerate their progress. There has been some work done on identifying what makes a good lesson and the school is working towards a more consistent approach to planning in literacy. A standardised format for planning lessons has been recently drawn up to help teachers focus more clearly on the needs of the pupils but it has yet to be implemented across the school. The recently introduced strategy 'talk for writing' is starting to have a positive impact in some lessons when the teacher effectively develops written language through speech. There are signs that marking has improved in some classes and in some instances it is increasingly effective in improving pupils' progress. However, the school is aware that it remains too inconsistent overall and plans are in place to address this and increase the level of involvement of pupils in assessing their own and each other's work.

In Year 6, booster groups are now in place to raise attainment and improve progress. Specific intervention programmes for less able pupils are helping to plug the gaps in their learning. Senior leaders are fully aware that more needs to be done



to ensure that lessons are sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils in all classes to avoid over reliance on booster groups and intervention, particularly as pupils approach the end of Year 6.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve attainment and progress for the most able pupils, particularly in English, by ensuring lessons consistently include work that provides sufficient challenge for all – inadequate

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There is a developing sense of commitment and a shared vision among senior leaders and governors to improve the school. Although the current senior leadership team has only been in place since January 2010, it is already adopting a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. The headteacher has been able to hand over some responsibilities and reduce the heavy workload she had in the autumn term 2009 following the last inspection and give greater attention to wider strategic development. While still a new team with varying levels of experience, leadership skills are developing but there is scope to further clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure greater accountability. There is an increased awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Action plans have been drawn up for each class teacher to bring a sharper and specific focus to improving the quality of teaching. The school's judgements about the quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 match closely those of inspectors. However, the observations in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not sufficiently focused on children's learning and development.

There has been some improvement in the quality of school improvement planning. Clearer priorities and specific time limited actions are now being identified along with sharper criteria for measuring success. There has been a determined effort and focused actions to raise attainment in reading. This is leading to a greater consistency in the teaching and organisation of reading across the school and improved progress. With the assistance of a governor, the school is refining its system for tracking pupils' progress to enable more robust checking of pupils' attainment and progress. This is helping to identify individuals and groups of pupils who are underachieving and gives a clearer overview of pupils' progress by year group. It does not yet, however, provide an overview of pupils' progress linked specifically to each class teacher to help senior leaders identify easily any inequalities in teaching between the mixed-age classes.

A clear management structure has not yet been established in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this is still having a detrimental impact on its overall effectiveness. Staff have worked hard in moving to the new accommodation but there is no clear leader to steer the reorganisation of the new unit and develop the provision. There remains a lack of consistency in planning and assessment across



the classes. The Reception-age children in the Year 1 class still do not have access to the same quality of play-based learning, particularly outdoors. In all classes activities are not always sufficiently challenging and there are missed opportunities to further children's development, especially their speech, language and personal skills. A recent external audit revealed weaknesses in children's personal care and in developing hygiene routines; this inspection confirms these weaknesses. A lack of secure knowledge and expertise in the Early Years Foundation Stage learning, development and welfare requirements also inhibits improvement.

Following a review of governance, the governing body is now strengthening its systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Governors have drawn up a clear evaluation of their actions so far and identified what they need to do next. A planned programme for visiting classrooms has recently been implemented and as a result, governors are now beginning to judge for themselves the effectiveness of the school's actions in bringing about improvements. They can talk more confidently about what is working well and where there has been insufficient improvement. For example, they realise there is a need to give greater attention to improving the Early Years Foundation Stage. Governors are responding well to the support given by the two additional governors and more are taking the opportunity to develop their roles through relevant training. Governors have raised their profile among staff, parents and pupils. They have helped to improve communications with parents and increase parental involvement in their children's learning and the life of the school. Governors now fulfil their statutory duties and are gaining a better awareness in relation to their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. They have been vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety during the current building work and firm plans are in hand to carry out risk assessments of the site to increase security further.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve the quality of the school's development planning by ensuring that it focuses on the school's most important priorities, identified through accurate and thorough self-evaluation – satisfactory
- Establish clear leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage – inadequate
- Ensure that the governing body provides sufficient challenge and support to the school and fulfils all statutory requirements – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action fulfils requirements and has been implemented in line with the school's priorities for improvement. The support provided from the authority, although some of it quite recent, has been helpful. For example, the audit on reading, training on 'Talk for writing' and improving the phonics provision. The local authority is now aware that as a matter of urgency the



school needs more focused support with specific expertise in the Early Years Foundation Stage to accelerate the pace of improvement.