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Mrs L Smith
The Interim Headteacher
Romsey Abbey Church of England Primary School
Church Lane
Romsey
Hampshire
SO51 8EP

Dear Mrs Smith

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Romsey Abbey Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Emma Ing HMI, and Robin Thelwell, additional inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 April 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 November 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 Diocese, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Romsey Abbey Church of England Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 April 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, senior staff and a selection of teachers. Meetings were also held with representatives of the governing body, two officers from the local authority and a group of pupils. Informal discussions took place between the lead inspector and some parents. Inspectors observed eleven lessons taught by nine teachers as well as sessions taught by support staff and volunteers working in the school. Five out of the eleven lesson observations were conducted jointly with the interim headteacher. The inspectors looked at the quality of teachers' planning, marking and assessments as well as the quality of pupils' work in lessons. They also scrutinised a range of data about attendance and attainment as well as the progress made by pupils.

Context

The former substantive headteacher was absent from the school from November 2009. She did not return and officially left in January 2010. The local authority commissioned the services of a serving headteacher from a nearby school to act as interim headteacher from the last week in February 2010 until the end of the summer term. During the week of this monitoring inspection the governing body appointed a new headteacher who is due to take up her post in September 2010.

There have been a number of staff changes since the time of the last inspection. This has resulted in the school having three teaching vacancies and temporary teachers working in Years 1, 3, 4 and 6. The permanent Year 4 teacher is currently on long-term sick leave. The English coordinator was one of the staff that have left the school and the responsibility for leading and managing English is currently being shared amongst the leadership team. The local authority is funding a teacher who works for half a week to support teaching and learning in Years 5 and 6. The member of staff who used to provide cover for teachers to do their planning, preparation and assessment, went on maternity leave at the end of March 2010. This cover is now provided by the special educational needs coordinator, who also teaches personal health and social education.

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

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making satisfactory progress. Provision in this part of the school is improving apace as the Early Years Foundation Stage manager has started to develop her role and is looking at ways of improving the quality of teaching and learning. This has led, for example, to time being used more efficiently and children developing greater levels of independence.

Published data for 2009 indicate that attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is rising and was above national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. More pupils than in most schools attained the higher Level 3 in reading. The school's data show that pupils in the infants are making satisfactory progress. However, the accuracy of this information is questionable due to the unreliability of assessment information in the past and the variable quality of teaching and learning seen. From the lessons observed, pupils in lower Key Stage 1 are making securely satisfactory progress, but progress in upper Key Stage 1 is very limited.

The school's results for 2009 show that there was a dip in attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science and that the progress that pupils made since leaving the infants, although seemingly satisfactory, was not as good as in 2008. In this key stage, pupils in Years 4 and 6 are currently making the most progress, with the least amount of progress being made in Years 5 and 3, although progress in Year 3 has recently shown signs of improvement. There are no significant differences between the performance of girls and boys. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also progressing as well as their peers.

Although the changes to staffing have been unsettling for all, the new staff, albeit working on a temporary basis, are making a particularly positive contribution to the extent to which pupils achieve and enjoy learning. However, the quality of teaching is still not good enough to ensure that all pupils are attaining as well as they might, and too many pupils continue to underachieve given their starting points.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is generally satisfactory. It is good when teaching inspires pupils to want to learn, such as when the teacher in Year 1 used information and communication technology (ICT) to display an animated programme accompanied by music to help pupils to learn and revise skills in reading and spelling. Some of the older pupils have received training on how to help their peers to resolve disagreements and this is a good example of how pupils are being encouraged to work collaboratively outside of lessons. There are also good opportunities for pupils to work well together during music and French lessons. Although teachers are providing more chances for pupils to gain independence, demonstrate initiative and solve problems, these are not sufficiently well planned to ensure pupils receive the guidance and support that they need to be successful. Pupils in Year 3 recently enjoyed a Caribbean workshop which introduced them to a different culture and different forms of music and art. However, parents and the school recognise that, while this was a real success, there is still a long way to go to help develop pupils' understanding of a modern and multicultural society. Pupils say they enjoy school, but find that at times the work set for them is too easy. In some of the lessons observed, too many pupils were not clear about the purpose of activities and what they were expected to learn. They also have yet to develop an appropriate range of ICT skills. Pupils feel safe at school and are confident that the adults will help them if needed.

Levels of attendance are lower than they were at the time of the school's last inspection. The school is working hard to help improve attendance for targeted pupils. However, efforts are being compromised by pupils being taken out of school during term time to go on holiday.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- enhance pupils' personal development and their preparation for their future lives – inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved, but this is mainly due to changes in staffing. Too much remains inadequate because insufficient progress has been made in remedying the weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum. Staff have benefited from training in the teaching of English, mathematics and ICT as well as in how to prepare, plan and assess lessons. However, it is still too early to see the impact of this training on the outcomes for pupils. Additional training is still required in these areas as well as in the teaching of phonics.

There are pockets of good practice in the school such as in the teaching of music, French and in Reception and Year 6. Where good teaching was observed teachers made use of a range of strategies that recognised the different ways in which pupils learn. Examples include the use of audio and visual aids, pupils talking in pairs before responding to teachers' questions, and pupils being encouraged to reflect on what they are learning and how much they have understood. Weak teaching in the school is characterised by teachers spending too much time talking. In these lessons, teaching and support staff are not skilled in how to check pupils' understanding of what they are learning or the progress being made. All too often pupils sit passively and do not engage actively or enthusiastically in their learning because tasks are either unclear or of little interest. Too much teaching focuses on activities and not on the development of skills, knowledge and understanding. This is reflected in weak planning which does not identify clearly enough, or in sufficient detail, what pupils of different abilities are expected to learn. Although teachers are beginning to plan for pupils of differing abilities, this is still not being done effectively and as a result pupils' needs are not being sufficiently well met. This includes the more able pupils who are capable of greater levels of challenge. Planning now includes more cross-curricular links, but this is a very recent development and has had little impact on learning. Links between ICT and other subjects have yet to be identified in long- and medium-term planning. There are still too few opportunities for pupils to write and use their mathematical skills across the curriculum, although there are now more opportunities for pupils to write in religious education lessons. New staff are more confident at using ICT in lessons, but the ICT curriculum has yet to be fully implemented and used well in other subjects.

Support staff contribute well when they receive good quality direction from teachers, but this is not yet happening sufficiently well. This results in missed opportunities for

supporting some of the less able pupils more successfully, for example through the greater use of practical resources. Support staff generally provide pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities with satisfactory additional teaching. The quality of this has recently improved because intervention strategies are now in place and there is better guidance as a result of the production and use of individual education plans. Parents with children who receive additional help spoke positively about the improvements made to the quality of support their child now receives.

The marking policy has been reviewed and pupils are being encouraged to reflect more on their learning. Although there are examples where marking is good, the quality of marking is too inconsistent. Furthermore, teachers are still not assessing pupils' progress and levels accurately because they are too unfamiliar with National Curriculum level descriptions.

Parents welcome the more regular use of homework, but too many are dissatisfied with the lack of response from some class teachers about how well their children have completed their work or are improving in their reading.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- rectify weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum in order to accelerate pupils' progress and raise their achievement – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Although the school has made inadequate progress since the time of the last inspection, there has been satisfactory progress since the arrival of the interim headteacher seven weeks prior to this monitoring inspection.

The interim headteacher has introduced a good programme to enable the school to track and monitor the progress made by pupils. This is now being done more effectively and has already been used by the interim headteacher to identify pupils making insufficient progress and provide them with additional support. The use of this programme is in the early stages of development and the school has yet to track the progress made by different groups of pupils and for subjects other than English and mathematics.

Parents speak positively about the interim headteacher, but recognise that the school has not made sufficient progress in remedying weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The interim headteacher has undertaken rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and provided the governing body with honest and accurate feedback. She has built on the work of the local authority to ensure that staff are more aware of their roles and responsibilities and are being held more to account for the progress made by pupils. As a result, the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved. The Early Years Foundation Stage manager is rising to the challenge of leading her area of responsibility, staff morale is better and there is more of a team spirit in the school, although this still has a way to go. Administrative staff feel valued and well guided:

they appreciate knowing what is expected of them and that support for their work is available when needed.

Governors have received some training and this enabled them to undertake a rigorous process in the appointment of a new headteacher. Despite their efforts and willingness to support the school, they have not had sufficient impact on helping it to improve. They have yet to set up a range of appropriate systems for seeking and responding to the views of parents and carers.

There is an over-reliance on the interim headteacher to drive improvements due to the remaining significant weaknesses in the leadership and management of the school, the lack of personnel to take on the role of middle managers, and the quality of governance. Consequently, despite the impact of the interim headteacher, other leaders and managers have not contributed sufficiently to helping the school improve.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders and managers gain the confidence of the school community, embed ambition and drive improvement – inadequate.

External support

In many ways the local authority and diocese have provided satisfactory support for the school. However, the impact of the external support has been inadequate. This is because there was a delay in the local authority identifying the full extent of the problems at the school. There is now a new School Improvement Partner and the local authority has an accurate view of the needs of the school. Consequently, the statement of action, although previously judged to be fit for purpose, has proved to be over-ambitious. Key milestones, such as having a target of 100% of teaching being satisfactory or better by April 2010, have not been met. Furthermore, staff have no sense of ownership of the statement of action. This limits the potential for the document to be used as a map for staff to see where the school needs to go, how it is going to get there, and their role on the journey of school improvement. The local authority has brokered a lot of training and support for staff, but the impact of this has been limited due to the changes in staffing and the remaining vacancies as well as the weaknesses in the leadership and management.