

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0300 123 1231
Ofstedhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



24 May 2010

Mrs Griffiths
Headteacher
Shinfield St Mary's CofE Junior School
Chestnut Crescent
Shinfield
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 9EJ

Dear Mrs Griffiths

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shinfield St Mary's CofE Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 May 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 – 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 the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Wokingham and the Director of Education, Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Special measures: monitoring of Shinfield St Mary's CofE Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 May 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents and looked at pupils' written work. She met with the headteacher, staff and pupils, members of the Interim Executive Board and representatives of the local authority and Diocese.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the number of pupils on roll since the last inspection, and staffing has remained stable. A senior teacher from a local primary school has been seconded to act as deputy headteacher for two days per week, from the beginning of the summer term. Additional, informal support for the headteacher has been made available from a headteacher in a neighbouring local authority. An Interim Executive Board replaced the governing body with effect from 1 March 2010.

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

The school took the decision that it would focus its energies and resources first and foremost on the achievement of the pupils currently in Year 6. Given the legacy of inadequacies in teaching and in leadership and management in recent years, these pupils had the greatest gaps in their learning. Staff have been deployed to create two small Year 6 classes instead of one, and there has been a range of additional interventions and support, including one-to-one tuition. The school's data, based on tests and teacher assessments, indicate that by the spring term three quarters of pupils in Year 6 were working at, or just below the level that might have been expected in writing and mathematics. In reading, it was around 90% of pupils. Based on this, the school predicts that the outcomes in this year's national tests will be much closer than last to those found nationally, which in 2009 were 80% in English and 79% in mathematics. However, the picture across other year groups was more variable at the mid-year point; ranging from around three quarters to less than a half working at an appropriate level, given the time of year. Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring inspection and pupils' work in their books confirms this picture. The school acknowledges that the next step is to ensure that attainment improves across the school, rather than relying on making up ground in Year 6.

The school's records indicate that by the spring term the large majority of pupils were making satisfactory progress and that for some, particularly in Year 6, it was better. However, even the accelerated progress this year will not be sufficient to



eradicate the legacy of underachievement for the oldest pupils. The progress they have made since the beginning of Year 3 is less than that in most similar schools, especially in mathematics, where the data indicate that only half will have made the expected progress. Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring inspection showed pupils often, although not consistently, making satisfactory progress. This variability has also been identified through the school's own monitoring and local authority visits. The bottom line is that to achieve satisfactory progress over time, let alone good or better, there must still be a heavy reliance on additional support and intervention.

Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning and school. They are not happy about the staff changes they have experienced in recent years, and appreciate the greater stability this year. They feel that changes in teaching style and curriculum content this year make learning more enjoyable.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is at least in line with the national average by July 2010 – satisfactory.
- Improve pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that it is consistently satisfactory or better throughout the school by July 2010 – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

There is a friendly atmosphere in the school. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and both they and the pupils report that it continues to improve. During the monitoring inspection pupils were well behaved in lessons and assembly and outside at break time. Particularly worthy of note was the calm and sensible way they moved around school, and from the playground to their classrooms at the end of break, with little prompting from staff. Headline figures indicate attendance has improved since the last inspection. However, there are a handful of pupils who are not making the progress they should and for whom absence or lateness may well be a factor in hindering their progress.

The effectiveness of provision

There have been some improvements in teaching. Teachers are now planning work to meet different levels of ability. A better balance of working together as a whole class and group activities helps pupils to maintain their concentration. Teachers strive to plan lessons that will capture pupils' interest and provide opportunities for practical work as well as written activities. The pupils appreciate this change, saying that it helps things to 'sink in better'. Overall, most teaching observed during the monitoring inspection was satisfactory. However, this masks the fact that while in



some classes there are pockets of good teaching, equally it is not yet consistently at least satisfactory across the school. Teaching assistants are not always sufficiently aware of planning, and are not always effectively involved at all points during the lesson.

Staff have taken on board the need to improve the use of assessment to inform teaching. Pupils have individual targets to help them understand what they should be aiming for over time. On a day-to-day basis, teachers are in the habit of sharing with pupils what they are learning and using success criteria to help pupils understand how well they are doing. The marking policy sets out how pupils should be given guidance on what they have achieved and on how they can improve. However, teachers are using these assessment strategies without fully appreciating how to make the most of them. No reference to individual targets was seen in either planning or lessons during the monitoring inspection. It is not always obvious why something is being taught. The links between the assessment of what pupils already know and can do, teachers' evaluation of what was achieved in the last lesson, and hence, what the next steps in learning should be are not clear enough. Consequently, the planning for different ability levels is not always matched closely enough to the needs of the actual pupils in the class, particularly those capable of achieving the higher levels. Marking is inconsistent across the school. Too often it is not linked to the intended learning or pupils are not given pointers for improvement. There is no evidence that pupils are given time to respond to comments. Very recently the school has introduced systems for ongoing assessment by teachers against clear criteria which help identify the next steps in pupils' learning. However, it is very early days and at this stage there is still a heavy reliance on tests to confirm pupils' attainment. In short, teaching, and particularly the use of assessment, is not yet good enough for pupils to make sufficient progress in their learning during the course of normal lessons, and certainly not at a rate to turn around the underachievement that exists.

The school implemented its plans to introduce a new curriculum from the beginning of the spring term. Termly topics link subjects together with the aim of making learning meaningful. Pupils spend time on Friday afternoons pursuing their interests or, more recently, developing their skills for learning through 'Shinfield University' courses. Feedback so far from staff, pupils and their parents, is positive. Pupils are enjoying their learning and are beginning to understand the need to take responsibility for their own learning. A recent survey of parents indicates they feel much more involved in their children's learning. The school believes the new way of working is having a positive impact on standards. For example, staff talk about how, because pupils have a better understanding of the context for their writing, they can focus on developing their writing skills. However, as yet this is anecdotal rather than being backed up by hard evidence or analysis. Furthermore, as the school acknowledges, enjoyment is not necessarily an indicator of the quality of learning. There is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that all subjects are fully covered, that there is progression over time and that there is an appropriate level of



challenge for pupils of all abilities. The delivery of the curriculum needs to be monitored and the impact on outcomes for pupils rigorously evaluated.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the curriculum so that it is stimulating and motivating with opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills and develop as independent learners – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The most significant change in leadership and management since the last inspection has been the appointment by the Secretary of State of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) to replace the governing body. This process took time, with the result that the IEB only came into existence at the beginning of March. Initial meetings were used to ensure it was fully briefed on the issues facing the school and on deciding how it would work through committees. Consequently, the first full meeting at which the headteacher was required to report on progress did not take place until the end of April. Nevertheless, the IEB is already demonstrating a clear understanding of the priorities for the school, and of its responsibility for holding the school to account for the quality of education and the pupils' achievement. It has taken ownership of the school's action plan. In doing so, it has prioritised the areas for development identified at the last inspection, but without losing sight of the wider issues it is responsible for, including reducing a deficit budget. IEB members recognise their responsibility for maintaining a high profile for safeguarding pupils and regularly checking that all requirements are met.

The decision to test all pupils in September to try to determine their starting points accurately, followed by mid-year tests and assessments, means the school is better placed to keep a check on pupils' attainment during the course of the year. Targets set the level each pupil is expected to reach by the end of the year and provide a benchmark for measuring progress. However, other than in Year 6, targets do not take sufficient account of any previous underachievement in order to get pupils back on track. Staff are becoming more involved in whole-school discussions about pupil progress and the IEB receive reports on predicted outcomes at the end of Year 6 for each cohort of pupils. While it is useful to have an eye to the future, it is important that senior leaders look more closely at what data tell them about current performance. Very recent analysis has looked at the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities but, as a rule, analysis is not incisive enough to interrogate the performance of different groups or evaluate the impact of strategies such as interventions or additional support.

The current staffing structure means that to date the vast majority of the improvement work and day-to-day management of the school have been vested in the headteacher. Monitoring of the school's performance has taken place, for



example, tracking pupils' progress and observing teaching and learning, and actions taken as a result have led to some improvement. The reality, however, is that there has not been sufficient capacity at a senior or middle leadership level to bring about rapid improvement. The senior leadership has been strengthened very recently by the appointment of a temporary acting deputy headteacher. It is early days, but this provides additional capacity to drive forward the improvements in assessment which are key to improving teaching and learning, and to support the headteacher in more rigorous analysis and evaluation of pupil progress data. Subject leader roles have been allocated among staff and there is evidence that staff are willing to take on responsibility but lack the experience to monitor and evaluate and lead improvement. There remains an urgent need to agree and implement a long-term staffing structure that has the capacity to drive school improvement, and that includes appropriate expertise in special educational needs.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the skills and activities of leaders and managers at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance in order to bring about rapid and sustained improvement – satisfactory.

External support

Overall, the local authority's support has been satisfactory. The statement of action it was required to draw up following the last inspection met requirements. It has invested significant resources in the school and its support and challenge have been important in securing satisfactory progress to date. Some actions in its plan have had a discernible impact. For example, the appointment of the IEB has strengthened the governance of the school and the focus on improved outcomes for pupils. The school improvement partner has provided useful training and has been key to quality-assuring the headteacher's judgements about teaching and learning. Support from local authority consultants is appreciated by staff at all levels. However, some actions have not been quick enough, notably identifying and responding to the need to increase the capacity of senior leaders within the school.