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

Dear Mrs Griffiths

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

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 September 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 second 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 for Wokingham and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 September 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, including those which track pupils' progress, and looked at pupils' written work. She was not able to observe teaching and learning, or look at pupils' work in Year 6 as the pupils and their teacher were out of school on a residential visit. The inspector met with the headteacher, staff and pupils, the chair 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 monitoring inspection. Support from the seconded acting deputy headteacher finished at the end of the summer term as she returned to her own school. A class teacher and the teacher providing cover for teachers' planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time left at the same time. The school now has four classes instead of five, and PPA cover is provided by regular supply teachers. An internal appointment has been made to the role of inclusion manager with effect from the beginning of this term and another teacher has taken over the role of English subject leader.

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

The school's decision to focus on addressing the gaps the outgoing Year 6 pupils had in their learning has had a positive impact on standards in English. Provisional data show an improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age in English. Overall, attainment was in line with those found nationally. Indeed, attainment in reading was higher than the national average. However, despite a 20% increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level, standards in writing were 12% below national average. Standards in mathematics remain a similar distance below the national average, with no improvement in test results in 2010. There are discrepancies in the school's data between the generally higher assessments made by teachers and the lower outcomes of tests. Nevertheless, it is clear from the school's records at the end of the summer term that standards remain variable. This is particularly in the lower year groups and in mathematics, the proportion of pupils working at an appropriate level for their age was still too low. Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring inspection and the pupils' work in their books confirms this picture.

Standards are not as high as they should be because the progress pupils make over time is variable. Despite some better progress last year, largely as a result of

additional interventions and support, the outgoing Year 6 pupils did not make the progress they should have done from the beginning of Year 3. The school's tracking records indicate that although the vast majority of pupils in other classes made some progress last year, for too many, it fell short of what is expected. It was certainly not enough to compensate for previous underachievement. However, there are some early signs which indicate that progress is improving across the school. In the summer term, intensive support was put in place for an identified group of underachieving pupils in each class to help them catch up. Although this was a relatively small group of pupils, around three quarters made accelerated progress over this time. Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring inspection showed pupils consolidating what they had learnt previously and moving forwards. There is already evidence this term of progress over time in their books. Staff have a better understanding of what constitutes expected progress each year, and recognise the need for some pupils to exceed this to get them back on track to achieve their potential.

Observations of pupils in class and discussions with them indicate that they generally have positive attitudes to school and their learning. In the main, pupils behave well in lessons and get on with the tasks set for them, although sometimes this masks the fact that not all pupils are fully engaged in learning. Some pupils appear to realise that they can avoid being challenged as long as they keep quiet and do not misbehave. There are also times when pupils demonstrate they are too ready to think that they cannot do something and ask for help.

Progress since the last visit 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 – inadequate
- 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

Improvements to the school site have helped improvements in the monitoring of pupils who arrive late. This, together with fully implementing systems to call parents on the first day their child is absent without giving a reason, has improved punctuality and attendance. Behaviour in and around school remains a relative strength. In the main, pupils work and play well together and are polite and welcoming to visitors. However, the school recognises there is more to be done to develop pupils' thinking skills and encourage them to take risks and become independent learners so that they are better prepared for their futures. As it has identified, some pupils lack the confidence to have a go at something in case they do not get it right.

The effectiveness of provision

Most of the teaching seen during the monitoring inspection was at least satisfactory. There is a better shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning, a more consistent approach to creating classroom environments that support learning and better involvement of teaching assistants. However, there is still some way to go in ensuring that the principles set out in the new teaching and learning policy, for example to encourage pupils to have the confidence to have a go at tasks they think are too difficult, are consistently implemented.

The use of assessment to inform teaching is developing. Planning is taking more account of the needs of the pupils in the class. Assessment data have been used to group pupils according to their ability and teachers plan work at three levels to match these different needs. New proforma for planning prompt teachers to evaluate the last lesson in order to identify what they need to teach in the next, although this is not always consistently implemented. At the beginning of lessons, teachers share with pupils what they are learning, and use success criteria to help them understand how well they are doing. However, sometimes this describes what the pupils will be doing rather than what they will actually be learning. The marking policy is more consistently applied. So far this term, work has been marked regularly and is better linked to the intended learning, but it is not consistently giving pupils pointers for improvement. There was no evidence seen during the monitoring inspection of pupils being given opportunities to respond to feedback.

The school has highlighted discrepancies between the teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing and the outcomes of tests. The school recognises that in some instances this has quite simply been inaccurate teacher assessments, but it also believes it is because pupils lack the confidence to have a go at what they perceive to be difficult questions in tests. Whilst this may be a factor, the school cannot yet be confident that teacher assessments are an accurate reflection of what pupils can do both independently, and can apply in different situations to be confident that they are secure judgements. The systems for ongoing assessment against criteria for different levels which had just been introduced at the last visit have not been developed any further.

Target setting is still work in progress. Whole-school targets in literacy and numeracy have been identified and translated into class targets at different levels for different pupils. Very recently, individual literacy targets have been introduced. Little reference to any of these targets was seen in either planning or lessons during the monitoring inspection.

The school continues to implement its new curriculum plans and is working with a group of local schools to consider how the curriculum may develop in the future. At the beginning of each topic teachers involve pupils in identifying what they already

know and what they would like to learn. Pupils appreciate this involvement in planning their own learning. Friday afternoon 'Shinfield University' sessions have made way this term for maths investigation activities to try to improve pupils' application of their mathematical knowledge. It is too early to determine whether this is having any impact and the school acknowledges the need, given the change in focus, to consider other ways of developing pupils' skills for learning.

Progress since the last visit 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

A combination of joint visits to see good practice in other schools, training and staff discussion has led to the better shared understanding of what good teaching and learning look like. Staff talk positively about the consistency of approach and feel that they are more part of a team.

However, the current staffing structure is not conducive to further school improvement. Whilst the headteacher has a good grasp of the things that need to be done, the loss of the acting deputy headteacher earlier than was anticipated and the inexperience of middle leaders mean that too much of the improvement work and day-to-day management of the school is still vested in her. Although the interim executive board has taken responsibility for some management tasks to relieve the pressure, there is still insufficient capacity or sense of urgency at senior and middle leadership level to drive the school forward at the pace required. The consequence of this is that work, which should have been done at this point in the term have not been completed. For instance, reassessing pupils where assessments are known to be inaccurate, analysing English test papers to identify areas for improvement and setting end of year targets. In turn, whilst the interim executive board does have a good overview of the school's position, because it has taken on additional responsibilities, it is not always as focused on pupils' achievement as it needs to be. It has not moved forward on appointing a parent champion or involving parents as new members of the interim executive board.

Monitoring and evaluation are not good enough to bring about improvement at the pace that is needed. The senior leaders have yet to provide training and support to develop the role of middle leaders. Existing systems are not yet systematic and incisive, for example in the analysis of pupil progress data to interrogate the performance of different groups. There are no clear systems for leaders at different levels to hold others to account to ensure that planned actions happen and that their impact is evaluated.

Progress since the last visit 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 – inadequate.

External support

The quality of the support from the local authority has been mixed. Some has been very practical and much valued in the context of capacity issues within school, for example a detailed analysis in mathematics of test papers and gaps in pupils' learning. The support from the School Improvement Partner provides an important external view of the quality of teaching and learning. However, in other respects the support has not been very focused. At times its challenge has not been rigorous enough and there has been a lack of shared understanding as to why particular support is being provided at certain times. There is a lack of clarity as to who was responsible for exploring the possibility of additional leadership support once the acting deputy headteacher had left. Furthermore, actions to strengthen and develop senior and middle managers have not been quick enough and are now a matter of urgency.