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9 December 2010

Mrs Marian Morgan and Mr Frank Toner  
The Acting Headteachers  
St John's Catholic Primary School, Trowbridge  
Wingfield Road  
Trowbridge  
Wiltshire  
BA14 9EA

Dear Mrs Morgan and Mr Toner

**Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Trowbridge**

Following my visit with Elizabeth Strange, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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 governing body and the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Clifton.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010**

- Raise attainment in science and ensure consistency in provision in all classes by the end of the autumn term 2010.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that 50% of lessons are good by the end of the autumn term 2010 and 80% by the end of spring term 2011 by:
  - assessing and marking work consistently and informing pupils what is good about it and what they need to do next to improve
  - making sure that pupils at different levels of ability know what they are expected to achieve by the end of a lesson.
- Raise expectations to ensure that all leaders and managers concentrate on raising attainment and accelerating progress by the end of October 2010.

## **Special measures: monitoring of St John's Catholic Primary School, Trowbridge**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2010**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteachers, subject leaders, pupils, parents and carers, members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority. During this inspection, Year 6 pupils and their class teachers were away on a field trip, so that while it was possible to see their books, they were not observed in lessons.

#### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership of the school has been reorganised. The acting headteacher at the time of the last inspection remains in post and currently has responsibility for day-to-day operational matters. She will retire at the end of term. Another acting headteacher was appointed in September to take charge of the strategic development of the school, and he will remain as acting headteacher until the school appoints a substantive headteacher. There is currently no deputy headteacher. The current leadership team is supported by an advisory headteacher from the local authority, who regularly works with the school to implement the local authority action plan for school improvement. Three new teachers have joined the school to replace departing staff. The governing body has a new chair and six new governors.

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

The school has successfully turned around the steady year-on-year decline in the attainment of Year 6 pupils that had led to the low overall levels noted in the last inspection report. Unvalidated national test results for Year 6 pupils in 2010 indicate that attainment in English and mathematics was above average, and that pupils made good progress to achieve these results. School strategies, devised after careful analysis of assessment information, led to considerable success for that 2010 Year 6 cohort. Such strategies included programmes to develop the higher level writing skills for more able pupils, to increase the challenge of teaching and learning in mathematics, and to intervene in support of underachieving pupils. For current pupils too, attainment continues to strengthen. Pupils' writing skills are developing particularly well, with good attention from an early age to the basic skills of clear letter formation, careful presentation and effective punctuation. Pupils' well-developed understanding of phonics enables them to be confident readers and writers, who are always ready to 'have a go' at spelling the words they wish to use. In mathematics too, pupils across the school have secure basic number skills and are increasingly aware of the range of strategies they can use to help them calculate

accurately. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors were full of praise for the effectiveness of the school's one-to-one teaching interventions for pupils who find mathematics difficult. Pupils generally show confidence in solving mathematical problems. The school is aware that the proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the higher Level 3 in mathematics remained too low in assessments in 2010.

School assessment information shows that attainment fell in science for pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2010. It remained broadly constant at the nationally expected Level 4, but the proportion attaining the higher Level 5 dropped markedly and was very low. Since September, specialist science advisory support and guidance from the local authority have helped teachers to reshape the science curriculum, with a greater emphasis now being placed on developing pupils' scientific skills and enquiry as well as their knowledge and understanding. Pupils generally enjoy this more active approach to learning. Their books show a developing confidence in setting up experiments and investigations, and in interpreting results, so that attainment is beginning to improve. There remains some inconsistency between classes in the pace of learning in the classroom, linked to variations in the quality with which teachers' planning ensures that lessons progressively develop new scientific knowledge and skills.

Progress since the last Section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment in science and ensure consistency in provision in all classes by the end of the autumn term 2010 – satisfactory.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Pupils' courteous and considerate behaviour remains a key strength of the school. Their palpable enthusiasm to fully and constructively engage in all activities in and out of class makes a strong contribution to their learning and to their personal development.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The first stage of the target set against the area improvement in teaching has been reached. Inspection evidence, together with the school's own extensive monitoring records, shows that now over half of teaching is good or better. Nonetheless, teaching remains satisfactory at best in too many lessons so it does not ensure that pupils make consistently good progress. Activities are systematically planned to take account of the range of abilities in the class. However, where teaching is no better than satisfactory, it is most often because the planned activities are not always successful in ensuring that all individuals and groups are suitably challenged and sufficiently engaged in learning to make good progress. Where the pace of learning flags for some, teachers do not always respond swiftly enough to adapt activities as the lesson proceeds.

Many aspects of teaching have strengthened in quality since the last inspection. This is particularly evident in literacy teaching throughout the school. Pupils are given

very clear and easily understood targets to improve their attainment in literacy, which are at the forefront of their minds when they engage in each piece of work. Teachers regularly assess work with reference to these targets and refer to them in discussion with pupils, so that the targets have a central role in driving improvement. In an outstanding literacy lesson, for example, the teacher asked pupils questions which were directly linked to their targets for improvement when the class contributed to a model piece of writing on the whiteboard. Learning objectives for lessons are clearly stated and pupils work with teachers to develop success criteria for learning in each lesson. The quality of teachers' marking of pupils work has improved rapidly over the term, so that marking offers comment on the success of the work and sets out clearly the next steps that can be taken to improve it still further. Sometimes, these 'next steps targets' are carried over from one piece of work to the next using transferrable notes. Older pupils in particular are becoming adept at assessing their own and each others' work against specific criteria.

The strong features of the use of marking and assessment in literacy are, however, yet to be consistently applied in other subjects. Not all pupils, for example, respond to teachers' recommendations for improvement or completion of work in mathematics. In science and mathematics, targets have been set for pupils but are not used as systematically or rigorously as the literacy targets to drive improvement.

Significant changes are underway in improving the quality of the curriculum. The new focus on developing pupils' scientific skills through the science curriculum is yielding success in challenging and engaging pupils, including the higher attainers who have not achieved well enough in the subject in the past. Teachers' confidence in managing the new approaches in science is developing, but still varies at present. The whole school curriculum is increasingly being shaped around themes and topics, allowing pupils to apply their skills and knowledge in interesting, relevant and meaningful ways. During the inspection, for example, pupils were seen successfully applying skills across a range of subjects in lessons on the theme of *The Titanic*, a topic through which connections to local people and places helped develop pupils' empathy and curiosity. Planning of the curriculum has yet to systematically incorporate reference to attainment targets in all subjects to ensure that pupils develop their skills progressively as they get older.

Progress since the last Section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that 50% of lessons are good by the end of the autumn term 2010 and 80% by the end of spring term 2011 – satisfactory.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The new senior leadership team has been successful in developing a cohesive school community with a strong focus on improvement. The school's action plan, taken directly from the local authority statement of action, has been used very effectively to drive, monitor and review improvement, although not all actions taken have had time to take full effect and show consistently good outcomes. Parents and carers

have welcomed the flow of information from the school on actions taken since special measures were applied, and the opportunities to engage in open and constructive dialogue with the headteachers and governors. Teachers have responded positively to an intensive programme of monitoring and development of teaching and learning, which has successfully improved the quality of provision in the classroom. The governing body, under new leadership and with a significant number of new members, has benefited from focused training on the interpretation of school performance data and methods of holding the school to account.

The school's capacity to improve has strengthened as self-evaluation sharpens. Staff and the governing body are making increasingly effective use of the good and well-presented performance data on pupil progress to help identify where improvement is most needed. However, the school's difficulty in recruiting and appointing a substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher presents a significant challenge in securing stability for its leadership and management. Planning for interim arrangements on the retirement of the current operational headteacher, and for substantive leadership structures in the future, remains too vague and should be addressed as an urgent priority.

Progress since the last Section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise expectations to ensure that all leaders and managers concentrate on raising attainment and accelerating progress by the end of October 2010 – good.

### **External support**

The local authority's statement of action is a sharp and well-focused document which has been very well used by the school to drive, monitor and review its improvement actions in most key areas. Support provided to the school has been very well tailored to its needs. Specialist advisory support in science has been particularly effective in reshaping provision in a subject where teachers' expertise is variable. The advisory headteacher has worked effectively alongside the acting headteachers to coordinate local authority support and to ensure that it is channelled to areas of greatest need. A 'case conference' structure has set in place an appropriate forum to ensure that all those involved in the drive for improvement – local authority consultants, governors, and school leaders – can contribute to a review of performance. The School Improvement Partner maintains regular external scrutiny of the school's performance.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that clear structures are in place for the senior leadership of the school, on an interim basis from January 2011 and when substantive appointments are made thereafter.
- Ensure that all individuals and groups of pupils learn well in lessons.