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3 February 2011

Mrs C Render/Ms Sue Stainton
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery
Victoria Road
Botcherby
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Cumbria
CA1 2UE

Dear Mrs Render/Ms Sue Stainton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 February 2011, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 2 March 2010

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally. In particular, the school should:
 - raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that work is matched more closely to pupils' learning needs, so that all pupils make progress in every lesson
 - improve the management of pupils' behaviour in lessons
 - improve the clarity of teachers' explanations of new work and of the tasks set for pupils
 - ensure that marking leads to improvements in pupils' work.
- Improve the standard of pupils' behaviour so that it does not hinder learning.
- Strengthen leadership so the school develops the capacity for sustained improvement.
- Ensure that pupils are taught age-appropriate basic skills progressively, especially in English and mathematics.
- Further improve pupils' attendance by ensuring that all possible measures to do so are robustly deployed.

Special measures: monitoring of St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery

Report from the second monitoring inspection from 1 to 2 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector looked at pupils' written work, spoke with pupils and observed teaching and learning in all classes. She scrutinised documents and met with the Chair of the Governing Body, the interim headteachers, subject leaders and the local authority School Improvement Partner.

Context

There has been a change in leadership arrangements since the last monitoring inspection. The interim headteachers in place at that time, left the school at the end of December and two more are leading improvements until a substantive headteacher is appointed. Both are headteachers of successful primary schools in the area and each is working half time on site at St Cuthbert's. These arrangements have been secured until the end of July 2011. The headteacher post has been re-advertised and any suitable candidates will be interviewed in February 2011. A teacher has been seconded from the local authority until 31 March 2011 to cover the ongoing long-term sickness absence.

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

Pupils are enjoying their learning more as teachers have introduced a broader range of activities which are better matched to their interests and ability. Teachers have worked hard to create bright and exciting classrooms that support learning well. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy lessons most where they 'have work that makes them think' and use their imagination. Observations and lesson planning indicated that many lessons are providing more stimulating and challenging activities. However, such practice is not embedded in every class from day to day. Some pupils feel that they spend too much time listening to the teacher and 'just writing on whiteboards'. They feel that some tasks are 'too easy', particularly in mathematics.

The school's tracking of pupils' progress shows that most pupils are making better progress. The work scrutiny confirmed that pupils' work is better presented and standards are generally improving. Nevertheless, there is still some variability in the achievement of pupils as they progress through the school. They are making accelerated progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 2 and in Year 6 but slower progress in Year 1, due to instability in teaching, and uneven progress across Key Stage 2. Attainment is improving but still below average as the accelerated progress is not sustained over time.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

All staff and pupils have contributed to the much-improved learning environment. Pupils appreciate their increased opportunities to make suggestions through the new school council. They feel listened to, as their ideas to improve playground equipment and rules for behaviour have been acted on. Older pupils are keen to take on more responsibility and contribute their views, for example, on teaching and learning. All pupils are playing their part in improving behaviour and maintaining a happy, friendly school. As a result, pupils feel safe and well cared for. They have confidence in staff to deal fairly with any issues that may arise.

Attendance and behaviour have continued to improve with the robust strategies in place to support and engage families where there have been persistent absenteeism or behaviour difficulties. Strategies implemented by the school's learning mentor, working in partnership with the local authority education welfare officer, have been highly effective. Attendance for the autumn term 2010 was much higher than during the same period the previous year and closer to the national average. Incidents of bullying or challenging behaviour are now rare and managed well within the school, so there have been no exclusions in the current year. Behaviour in lessons has notably improved as activities have become more interesting. The improvements have been brought about by all adults working together to help pupils manage their own behaviour and support those experiencing difficulties.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the standard of pupils' behaviour so that it does not hinder learning – good
- Further improve pupils' attendance by ensuring that all possible measures to do so are robustly deployed – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved as teachers have made lessons more varied and interesting. Assessment is being used to better effect to plan differentiated tasks that take account of varying ability levels within each class. Pupils who are falling behind or have special educational needs are being more effectively supported through improved individual education plans and intervention programmes. The effective all-round pastoral support is improving outcomes for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

Teachers have engaged well with professional development and have enthusiastically embraced initiatives introduced this term. Their commitment is evident in the improvements made to lessons. The most successful lessons provide pupils with opportunities to investigate, solve problems, express their views and use their imagination. Pupils are engaging in a greater range of writing in different subjects and acquiring a better

understanding of language features and structures of various text types as a result. In all classes, pupils' behaviour is being well managed so that it no longer disrupts learning. Pupils are enjoying lessons more and show perseverance and application when given the opportunity to practise and refine their skills during independent work.

Despite these improvements in many lessons, some weaknesses remain in teaching as a whole, that limit pupils' continuous progress and their attainment in end-of-key-stage tests. Pupils are still working below age-related expectations across the school because they are not building on their key skills continuously and rapidly enough. In some classes pupils have limited opportunities to sustain concentration and practise their writing skills on longer pieces of independent work. In mathematics, they have too few opportunities to solve problems and carry out investigations. As a consequence, they do not develop stamina or the skills to notice errors and self-correct. While assessment is being used to better effect to plan lessons from day to day, it is not used sufficiently well to ensure that pupils build on prior learning and make accelerated progress across the whole school. For example, pupils say that some work is not challenging enough because it repeats what they have previously learned, particularly in mathematics.

All teachers are using a consistently rigorous approach to marking which has led to improvements in presentation. They have a better understanding of the levels pupils should be achieving and have set appropriate targets to help them work toward them. However, pupils' writing shows repeated errors in spelling and punctuation that have not been checked. The introduction of specific sessions to teach literacy skills is helping to address this but the sessions are not always matched precisely enough to pupils' learning needs. Pupils are enthusiastic about other changes to the curriculum, saying they enjoy the topics being covered.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally – satisfactory

- Ensure that pupils are taught age-appropriate basic skills progressively, especially in English and mathematics – inadequate

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new interim arrangements are helping to secure further improvements. The headteachers are providing effective, purposeful leadership to drive forward the school's raising achievement plan. They have a clear overview of improvements and weaker aspects, based on sound monitoring. The action plans are appropriate and the necessary improvements are being pursued with energy and rigour. Staff have given this drive their full support; they show great determination to improve the school and raise achievement. All staff have a personal action plan, which has been helpful to date, but has not been

reviewed in the light of improvements already made. The links between the individual action plans, pupil progress meetings and performance management targets are not clear.

The Chair of the Governing Body has a good understanding of the school's needs and governors' collective role in supporting improvement. He is leading governors to give better levels of support and challenge to school leaders. The deputy headteacher and subject leaders are taking a more strategic lead based on their increased understanding of whole-school issues. Their role in monitoring provision and pupils' progress has developed considerably since the last monitoring inspection, supported by professional development and the allocation of time to these roles. The capacity of the senior leadership team is strengthening as a consequence. Alongside this, the quality of provision shows improvement, indicating satisfactory progress in developing leadership and capacity since the last monitoring inspection. However, the capacity for sustained improvement remains fragile because the school is still highly reliant on external support at leadership level and in respect of some staffing.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- Strengthen leadership so the school develops the capacity for sustained improvement – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has continued to provide appropriate support to ensure the drive for improvement continues. Advisers and consultants have provided a good range of whole-staff training and individualised professional development. The interim headteachers are providing good support to help staff develop leadership skills and improve teaching.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no additional priorities for improvement. As discussed with the school, the next monitoring inspection will look in more detail at the performance management process and developments to secure continuity in learning and sustained pupils' progress from year to year.