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17 January 2011

Mrs Joanne Clifford-Swan
Acting Head of School
St Bede's RC VA Primary School
Ridge Terrace
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 6EQ

Dear Mrs Clifford-Swan

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Bede's RC VA Primary School

Following my visit with Jim Bennetts, additional inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 January 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 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 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

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 Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement, attainment and progress in writing, especially for boys and the more-able pupils by:
 - making lessons more interesting and exciting in order to engage pupils fully and help develop writing skills
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to talk about what they are going to write about before they tackle a writing task
 - ensuring that there is a clear focus on improving writing skills, whenever pupils are writing in other subjects across the curriculum.

- Improve the quality of the teaching and the use of assessment so that there is greater proportion of good or better learning in lessons by:
 - raising the expectations of learning and progress in lessons
 - using assessment information more precisely to inform planning and provide challenge for the more-able pupils
 - increasing the pace of learning and the active involvement of pupils in learning activities
 - improving marking and the use of targets to help pupils become more aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - improving the management of pupils' behaviour to promote a positive climate for learning.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including the governing body by:
 - securing stability in the long-term leadership of the school
 - ensuring that recently introduced systems to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of provision are checked rigorously for their impact on pupils' achievement
 - ensuring greater rigour in the way teachers are held accountable for pupils' progress
 - creating a curriculum that motivates and engages pupils more fully and that more closely meets the needs of all pupils
 - developing and implementing policy and plans for promoting community cohesion that fully take into account the school's context and evaluates its impact on pupils' outcomes.

Special measures: monitoring of St Bede's RC VA Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the acting head of school, staff, parents, two groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a local authority representative and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding procedures, pupil tracking systems and pupils' writing in Years 1 to 5.

Context

In September 2010, St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School changed to a primary school due to local authority and diocese reorganisation from a three-tier to a two-tier system. There are Year 5 pupils in the school for the first time and they will stay in the school until Year 6 and transfer to the local Catholic high school. Since the inspection in June 2010, one teacher and the headteacher have left the school. An experienced deputy headteacher has been appointed for one year to be the head of school and the headteacher from St Benet Biscop Catholic Voluntary Aided High School on the same site has been appointed as acting executive headteacher. The local authority replaced the existing governing body with an IEB to oversee the recovery of the school and have set up a shadow governing body. Two local authority consultants have been seconded to teach and support in the school, an assistant headteacher has been seconded from a local primary school and a new teacher from a local middle school has joined the staff.

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

Senior leaders have focused their efforts on raising pupils' progress through developing teachers' skills in assessing pupils' work. This has resulted in the improved accuracy of pupils' data which are being checked more rigorously. Pupils' progress meetings are held half termly with all staff and teachers are held to account for the progress of pupils in their class. During the monitoring inspection pupils were taking part enthusiastically in lessons and were able to talk about their work and in most lessons had a purpose for their writing. In the most recent tests attainment in writing dipped slightly but there were improvements in reading and mathematics to broadly age-related expectations. The school's own data and the work in pupils' books confirm this. The systems put in place have not had enough time to have an impact on the overall progress of pupils' writing in all year groups but there is evidence that in classes where the teaching is strongest, progress is accelerating for boys. There has been less progress for more-able pupils because the activities set are not challenging enough in the majority of lessons and there is an overuse of printed worksheets which limits younger pupils' ability to write at length.

Pupils from Year 1 onwards have gaps in their knowledge of how to match letters and sounds, which is hampering their ability to write. The good skills they develop in the Reception class through daily letters and sounds lessons are not systematically built on throughout the school and, therefore, these skills do not develop quickly enough and are not secure.

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

- Raise achievement, attainment and progress in writing, especially for boys and the more-able pupils – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

A concerted effort by senior leaders to improve behaviour across the school has been successful. A new policy, coupled with consistent approaches to behaviour management by all staff has improved pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. No incidents of poor behaviour were observed during the monitoring inspection and pupils said that behaviour in lessons was much better and did not disrupt their learning. The few pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour are well managed. There are nurture sessions for some pupils to develop their social skills and to help raise their self-esteem. While these are effective in the short term, they are not yet well enough planned to ensure that these pupils do not miss out on the learning taking place in the classroom.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching has improved with only one inadequate lesson observed during the monitoring inspection and some good teaching seen. The consultants working in the school are good role models and have been effective in working alongside teachers, supporting and coaching them. There have been improvements to the learning environment in all classrooms and teachers are giving clear messages to pupils about what they are going to learn. In the best lessons there is a good match of activities to different abilities but in some satisfactory lessons there is still a mismatch; with too many low-level activities for lower ability pupils and a lack of challenge for more-able pupils. Pupils say that they enjoy their learning more because they are more involved and have more opportunities to talk in pairs and groups about their work. They think that this helps them with their writing. In observed lessons pupils were engaged for the majority of the time; even when they were sitting on the carpet, and they were clear about what they needed to do in the follow-up activities. However, work in books shows that marking is still inconsistent in some classes and is not yet telling pupils the next steps in their learning.

The curriculum has been completely revised under topic themes and this is helping to give pupils a context for their writing. In a lesson for the oldest pupils, who were learning to take notes in preparation for a magazine to be produced later in the term, the teacher clearly identified why pupils needed to learn the skill and put it

into a context pupils could understand. As a consequence, the pace of the lesson was brisk and lively, pupils were engaged for the whole lesson and they made good progress. This revised curriculum is in the early stages of development and the school has not yet produced an overview of the whole academic year to ensure that statutory requirements are being met.

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

- Improve the quality of the teaching and the use of assessment so that there is greater proportion of good or better learning in lessons – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of the executive headteacher from the high school is developing a meaningful partnership between the two schools. Personnel from the high school have taken over much of the financial management of the school as well as developing information and communication technology systems and management. There are very clear roles and responsibilities outlined between the executive headteacher and the head of school and they are working well together to bring about improvement.

Since taking up their posts, senior leaders, including the executive headteacher, have carried out a planned two weekly programme of lesson monitoring with detailed lesson feedback given through lengthy professional dialogue with every teacher. Teachers have been supported by the consultants working in the school. Targets for improvement are set and followed up in subsequent observations. This has been successful in eradicating the majority of inadequate teaching across the school. Teachers say that they feel well supported and valued; they understand what needs to happen for the school to improve and staff morale is high.

The Northumberland Catholic Extended Services Partnership, known as the St Bede's Family Team, has relocated to a spare classroom in the school. The leader of this team has been appointed as a Parents' Champion and the team is instrumental in improving communication and renewing the confidence of parents. They work closely with senior leaders and hold parents' forums which are increasingly well attended. Improvements are evident in enriching the curriculum through visits and visitors, the provision of new and exciting after-school clubs and the weekly newsletters resulting in better engagement of parents in the life of the school. Parents have confidence in senior leaders and feel that they are listened to and that the school takes action on their concerns.

The IEB meets regularly and visits the school often. Its members receive regular feedback from the head of school and monitor the work of senior leaders against the statement of action produced by the local authority. However, the school's own raising attainment plan is not detailed enough. There is a lack of clear, precise

targets with appropriate milestones by which the school's success can be measured and this makes monitoring improvements difficult. The IEB members have also not ensured that an audit and subsequent action plan for promoting community cohesion is in place.

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

- Strengthen the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including the governing body – satisfactory

External support

The local authority acted quickly after the previous inspection in June 2010 to secure the stability of leadership within the school. The appointment of the headteacher from the high school as executive headteacher alongside the seconded head of school is working well. The appointment of an IEB and a shadow governing body is a useful exit strategy and the shadow governing body members are undertaking extensive training and support. The local authority statement of action is detailed and sets out the priorities for the school and has been a useful document as a starting point for senior leaders. However, a change to both the School Improvement Partner and the local authority support officer this term has resulted in the school's own raising attainment plan not being robust enough and this had not been previously identified. The local authority has seconded experienced staff to the school to improve the capacity for good teaching but these appointments are temporary and decisions about making substantive appointments at both class and senior leadership level have not yet been finalised. This is hampering the school's ability to develop its capacity to improve.

Priorities for further improvement

- Produce a detailed raising attainment plan with smaller steps, sharper actions for improvement and relevant milestones which can be better monitored by senior leaders and the IEB.
- Introduce a systematic approach to the teaching of letters and sounds in Years 1 to 4.