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Mr Frank Toner
The Headteacher
St John's Catholic Primary School, Trowbridge
Wingfield Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
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Dear Mr Toner

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

Following my visit to your school on 30 and 31 March 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 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Up to two newly qualified teachers may 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 second monitoring inspection on 30 and 31 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, phase and subject leaders, pupils, parents, carers, governors, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one of the two acting headteachers has retired and the other has been appointed as the school's substantive headteacher. The post of deputy headteacher has been advertised nationally for a September 2011 start. An interim leadership team has been established, comprised of an acting assistant headteacher who also leads Key Stage 2, together with the acting phase leaders of Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage. One class teacher has left the school and has been replaced.

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

Pupils' independent learning skills have improved significantly since the last monitoring inspection. Within lessons across Key Stage 2, teachers take every opportunity to manage classes so that pupils themselves lead the learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their more active involvement in all aspects of their lessons. They have a strong understanding of the goals they need to reach in order to improve the standard of their work, and challenge themselves and each other to achieve them. They are highly articulate in critically evaluating their work against clear and demanding success criteria, which they have often devised together with the rest of the class in order to take their work to higher levels. Parents and carers told the inspector how struck they had been by their children's now detailed understanding of their levels of attainment and what they needed to do to improve. Middle and higher attainers are responding particularly well to very challenging work across all subjects in Years 5 and 6.

Pupils' learning and progress are less rapid across all subjects in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. Pupils have secure basic literacy and numeracy skills in Years 1 and 2, but the school recognises the need to further refine and develop aspects of pupils' writing, including opportunities to write at length. The pace of learning is sometimes slower in lessons in Key Stage 1 because pupils are not always fully clear about what they are expected to achieve and how to best complete their tasks or improve their work. Pupils receiving specific intervention to support their progress in mathematics in Key Stage 1 through the 'Numbers Count' programme have made excellent progress in their confidence and competence with number.

There is now a coherent, well-planned programme of science in place across the school. In Key Stage 2 in particular pupils have a good understanding of scientific principles and processes which underpin their thorough and effective investigative and experimental work. Occasionally, pupils spend too long building up to practical work when opportunities could be taken to learn more swiftly and effectively from the activity itself.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' highly positive attitudes and behaviour continue to contribute very strongly to their learning in class. They participate in a wide range of activities, for example in sport and music, with energy, skill and enthusiasm. They are mature, confident and articulate in putting forward their views on a wide range of issues, and are excellent ambassadors for the school.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching in Years 5 and 6 consistently features much exemplary practice in all of the key areas for improvement set out in the last section 5 inspection. Clear success criteria for each lesson or each piece of work drive much outstanding learning. The pupils themselves often help to devise the success criteria, drawing crisply on an exceptionally clear understanding of the overall learning objectives and their key targets for improvement in their work. Groups of pupils collaborate very effectively in working on tasks which are very well matched to their abilities, allowing teachers to circulate very effectively between groups and individuals to ensure that they keep on track. Teaching assistants and other adults have well-planned roles within the class, working with groups of pupils across the attainment range to help pupils deal with challenging tasks. Activities are carefully timed to maintain an urgent pace throughout lessons, and teachers use plenary sessions between and within activities to allow pupils to show off what they have achieved, allowing good practice to be shared and celebrated. 'Marking ladders' allow teachers and the pupils themselves to assess the level of attainment of each piece of work and to highlight the steps needed for improvement to the next, higher level.

Across the rest of Key Stages 1 and 2, similar examples of good practice can now be found in most areas, but are at present less strongly embedded than in Years 5 and 6. The use of success criteria is becoming widely established, but there is some variation in the quality of teachers' planning and management of classes to ensure that all pupils of often very different abilities achieve these with equal success. Group work, for example, is not always well monitored to ensure that all groups are making the progress expected and that they are not finding tasks too easy or too difficult. The quality of marking and the feedback that pupils get on their progress has, however, improved markedly in nearly all classes. Pupils now get clear and

detailed information on how well they have done and how to improve across most subjects, and younger pupils too are becoming involved in assessing their own learning and progress.

Curriculum planning has been further strengthened since the last monitoring inspection. As subject coordinators have developed their new roles, they have helped to devise planning documentation which for most subjects now helps to teachers to ensure that, as pupils get older, they learn new skills in the topics they study rather than repeating what they have done before. This 'planning for progression' is still to be put in place for some subjects, including art, design and technology, but development is well underway.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of a substantive headteacher has been widely welcomed by stakeholders for providing stability in the school's leadership after a long period of uncertainty. It has also secured continuity in the school's drive for improvement. The headteacher has been relentlessly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning through an intensive and extensive programme of lesson observations and monitoring of pupils' work. Those teachers newly appointed to acting senior leadership or subject leadership roles have played an increasingly effective role in supporting and developing the school's thorough self-evaluation. In particular, the school's use of performance data on pupils' progress has continued to strengthen and has enabled leaders to identify precisely areas where improvement is less rapid than others. Leaders of core subjects of English, mathematics and science have therefore been able to focus on investigating why rates of progress vary and to deploy support, including that of local authority consultants, where it is most needed. Less use has been made of the views of parents, carers and pupils in informing school self-evaluation. The development of leadership roles across the school is in its early stages but many teachers are now exercising these key responsibilities with good effect.

The governing body has benefited considerably from the much clearer flow of information on the achievement of pupils. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are now able to ask searching questions about school performance. The local authority has returned full delegated powers to the governing body as an endorsement of its increasing capacity to govern the school.

Progress since the last monitoring 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

Support provided by the local authority has been highly effective. It has been very well tailored to meet the school's specific needs. For example, consultants working to support the development of science, of teaching and learning, and of leadership and management capacity, have all had a significant impact on the school's improvement. The school's leaders and teachers speak warmly of the positive benefits which high-quality consultant support has brought to their own professional development. They welcome the way in which consultants have not only given advice but have also been able to offer models of good practice, which have been embraced successfully across the school. 'Case conferences' have continued to be effective in monitoring the school's improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that an effective substantive structure for the leadership and management of the school is put into place following the appointment of a new deputy headteacher in the summer term.
- Secure the consistent implementation of best practices in teaching and learning across the school.