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19 May 2011

Mrs J Clifford-Swan
Acting Head of School
St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Ridge Terrace
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 6EQ

Dear Mrs Clifford-Swan,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 May 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 Jun 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

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,

Mrs Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 23 Jun 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 Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection from 17 and 18 May 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the current executive headteacher, the acting head of school, senior staff, parents and carers, group of pupils, members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), two local authority representatives and the School Improvement Partner. She scrutinised safeguarding procedures, pupil tracking systems, pupils' assessments in writing and pupils' English books in Years 1 to 5.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the executive headteacher and the acting head of school have secured new posts elsewhere from September 2011. A new executive headteacher from the Catholic high school has been appointed for one year. A substantive head of school has been appointed and she is already working in the school as a consultant teacher. There have been staff absences in the main school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage unit. All staff have now returned to work.

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

Systems to track pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics have been developed and are understood by all teachers. Teachers have a clearer understanding of the progress pupils are making and the need to plan lessons which engage and motivate pupils of different abilities. In the lessons observed, pupils were engaged in learning for the majority of the time and there were increased opportunities for them to discuss their learning with each other and the teacher. In some classes, pupils are still writing short pieces of writing or completing their writing on work sheets which is limiting their ability to write at length. There are too few opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' comments in their books or edit and redraft their work. Daily sessions across the school where pupils match sounds and letters are helping pupils to plug some of the gaps in their knowledge, especially for the youngest pupils. This has not had time to have an impact on overall writing attainment but evidence can be seen in books that there is some improvement in spelling and phonic knowledge. Pupils' work shows that there are pockets of accelerated progress for some groups of pupils in most classes. More pupils are accelerating their progress in mathematics and reading than in writing. This is because in these lessons there are tightly focused activities which better match the needs of pupils' different abilities. In writing lessons, pupils often carry out the same writing task and lower and higher ability pupils are too often over supported in their writing. This is also limiting teachers' ability to accurately assess their attainment and set clear targets for improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring 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

Senior leaders have reviewed the provision for a few pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour and were being taught in the mornings in a nurture group. These pupils' needs are now better met in class with support from teaching assistants, often on a one-to-one basis. This is ensuring that they have access to the same learning opportunities as their peers.

The effectiveness of provision

Senior leaders are rightly focusing their work on improving all teachers' ability to deliver good learning in lessons. There has been extensive support and professional development for all teachers, including much work on how to accurately assess pupils' attainment. This has been successful in assessing mathematics and reading attainment and these assessments are now being used to plan effectively for different ability groups in lessons. Assessments are carried out regularly. Marking in writing does not tell pupils the next steps in their learning and is, therefore, not moving learning forward. Pupils have targets for improvement in writing but currently these are not specific enough to move pupils' writing forward because they do not match the gaps in attainment identified in pupils' books. There has been much improvement to classroom environments, with working walls to prompt pupils and displays of writing, annotated against National Curriculum levels, for pupils to aspire to. These are helping pupils see what their writing should look like and how they can improve it. In lessons observed, teachers are able to model writing well and are breaking lessons up into shorter, sharper sessions that are engaging pupils more in their learning, especially boys. There has been less progress in teachers using the assessments that they make to plan writing activities for different ability groups, because during the inspection, most pupils carried out the same writing task. In some lessons, lower-ability pupils were over-supported by teaching assistants, who have too low expectations of what pupils can achieve. The vast majority of teaching seen during this inspection had improved since the last monitoring inspection.

Pupils' attainment data are being used effectively to identify underachievement. Observed intervention and catch-up programmes are successful in helping pupils to practise and develop their basic skills especially in reading and mathematics. In these sessions, pupils are very focused on improving one aspect of their work and consequently they make better progress. Work in books for these pupils shows that the planned sessions are beginning to improve overall attainment. The school has established clear rewards and consequences for pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour and pupils say that they understand what is expected of them and that they are getting along better in the playground.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 acting head of school and the executive headteacher have clearly identified the need to improve teaching and learning and have had some success in reducing inadequate teaching. The systems put in place can be clearly seen in all lessons and have improved the pace of learning and raised teachers' expectations of what good learning should be. The new systems for tracking pupils' progress are effective in holding teachers to account and teachers are better at using the data to plan learning. Currently, data are not analysed in enough detail for different groups of pupils and it is difficult to compare the progress of different pupil groups to see what is having the most impact. This use of data is in the early stages of development for writing as more work is needed to ensure that the assessments teachers make are always accurate. Evidence from senior leaders' monitoring is used well to check that systems in place are having an impact on learning and involve all teachers. Middle managers in the school are beginning to take on more responsibility and become more involved in monitoring and evaluating their subject areas. This is a work in progress because some staff have changed responsibilities or taken on temporary roles to cover for absent colleagues.

The IEB has secured the long-term stability of the school by appointing a substantive head of school, and an interim executive headteacher from the high school for one year to replace the present post holder. Rigorous recruitment procedures have been followed and the new appointments are already working in the school to aid transition over the next term. The school's arrangements for checking the suitability of adults working with children meet current requirements. An audit of community cohesion has been carried out and an action plan is in place. This is closely linked to the new curriculum map and there are many planned opportunities for pupils to link with schools in different circumstances than their own. The parent champion from 'Learning Links' is continuing to work closely with the school. She is developing firm links with parents and carers within the community. Regular and well attended coffee mornings and the formation of a parents' forum are improving communication with parents and carers and they are becoming much more involved in the life of the school. Parents and carers have confidence in the school leadership.

Actions taken by senior leaders and the IEB have strengthened the structure and reliability of systems to assure the quality of the school's work; firm foundations have been established on which to build. A detailed plan is in place to enable a seamless transition when the new senior leaders take over their roles in September.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

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



External support

The local authority offers effective support to the school. The IEB carry out extensive monitoring of the school's work; are regular visitors and have a presence within the school. The shadow governing body are developing their knowledge and expertise through professional development and guidance from IEB members. The School Improvement Partner has a good knowledge of where the school is in relation to the areas for improvement identified in the last Section 5 inspection and offers effective challenge and support. The local authority and the IEB are working effectively together to enable the school to move forward and consolidate the improvements made so far.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teachers' ability to assess pupils' writing accurately and provide more opportunities for pupils to carry out extended pieces of writing unaided in all classes.