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8 March 2012

Miss Kate Horn
Headteacher
St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School
Ridge Terrace
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 6EQ

Dear Miss Horn

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

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 March 2012, 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 fourth 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 - good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - good

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



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 Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, senior and middle leaders, staff, a group of pupils, a parent, a member of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a local authority representative. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding procedures, pupil-tracking systems and work in pupils' English and mathematics books in Years 1 and 6.

Context

Since the last visit there has been some staff turbulence. A member of staff remains on long-term absence, covered by two existing part-time staff working full time. The deputy headteacher of school has secured a post in another school and will leave at the end of this term. Another member of staff is currently on sickness leave covered by job-share supply teachers. The IEB has produced an exit strategy for the development of the shadow governing body and timescales for the changeover. The interim executive headteacher from the local Catholic high school has been appointed substantive headteacher of the high school with executive responsibility for the primary school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress is accelerating rapidly across the school, especially in writing. The new systems for checking pupils' progress coupled with careful and regular monitoring and focused staff development is beginning to have an impact on developing pupils' basic skills. This accelerated progress is evident in pupils' books where common words are being spelt correctly; pupils are developing better sentence structure and the quality and amount of writing is improving. The targets that pupils now have in their books and the consistency of feedback through teachers' marking are helping pupils know how to improve their work. In the Early Years Foundation Stage classes parents are encouraged to come into school with their children and write alongside them every day. This initiative is very well attended and has resulted in children in the Reception class exceeding expectations of their knowledge of 'the sounds that letters make' and their ability to use this knowledge to write unaided. Older pupils in the school are much more aware of the targets they are working towards and could talk knowledgeably about where improvements have been made in their writing and what they still needed to do.

In lessons pupils are given tasks to do which better meet their needs and keep them engaged for the whole lesson. Expectations are higher and pupils know what is expected of them. The more-able pupils are given extra challenge more often and lesson planning shows that more lessons are reviewed and revised as a consequence of previous learning.

Pupils progress in mathematics is also accelerating but not at the same rate as their reading and writing. The school has plans to focus on this area next term. In lessons observed pupils were well engaged in discussions about mathematical concepts with a better range of opportunities for problem solving. In a Key Stage 2 lesson pupils were able to work in pairs to order mixed numbers and fractions and represent them in their books. The learning had moved on quickly over three days from an understanding of simple fractions and an ability to draw them, to understanding size; being able to compare fractions and an understanding of equivalent fractions. In another intervention lesson pupils were using their knowledge of place value and mental strategies to compete against each other in teams on the interactive whiteboard. In this lesson pupils had to keep a running tally of the total as new digits were added to different columns. There was a rapid pace and good challenge for different abilities. However, younger pupils have fewer opportunities to count and develop their quick recall of number facts on a daily basis.

Parents are happy with the improvements the school has made. One parent made a point of telling the inspector how the school has improved parents and carers' ability to work with their child through the many workshops run by the school, for example, in phonics and mathematics and that these are very well attended and valued.

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 – good

The quality of teaching

The revised tracking system is giving teachers a much clearer picture of where pupils are in their learning and more teachers are using this information to plan for individual groups of pupils in lessons. They carry out far more regular assessments of pupils' abilities and have better data on different groups within the school. Currently, these are not used consistently enough to plan for individual groups across the school. For example, the data shows the pupils who are known to be eligible for a free school meal, and those with a Gypsy/Roma heritage are not accelerating their progress at the same rate as other pupils, and teachers are not catering sufficiently for these pupils in their planning.

The inspector observed an increased amount of good teaching on this visit. The pace and challenge for the more-able pupils has improved and learning moves along quickly with a mini plenary and improved use of whiteboards to check learning throughout the lesson and to rectify misconceptions before moving learning on. Teachers are planning more exciting learning opportunities, for example, a drama session in a writing lesson for Year 3 pupils which gave pupils a purpose for their writing and engaged them in the learning. Teachers are also planning more opportunities for pupils to discuss their work and give explanations which encourage them to think and reason.

In some lessons pupils had opportunities to read the teacher's comments about the previous day's work at the beginning of the lesson. This was effective in telling pupils what they had done well but as yet there are few opportunities for pupils to respond to these comments or to edit their work and improve it.

Pupils say that lessons are more interesting and that they feel more involved in their own learning. Year 6 pupils are aware of what they need to do to achieve well in the upcoming national tests and feel well prepared.

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 – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved significantly over time. It is rare that teachers need to resort to the school behaviour-management procedures in lessons but when they do they are used consistently by all staff. As a consequence pupils' behaviour rarely disrupts learning and pupils spoken to confirmed this. There is still some boisterous behaviour at break and lunch times but this is decreasing.

Pupils think that behaviour is improving and that bullying is declining. A recent initiative has raised the profile of all types of bullying and pupils are aware of cyber-bullying and the dangers of social networking sites although they are less aware of the dangers of using message boards or on-line gaming.

Attendance has declined since the last visit and has fallen below national expectations. The school has raised the profile of attendance with parents and carers and pupils. Attendance is mentioned in newsletters and assemblies and there are displays around the school. Pupils welcome the stickers they receive for good attendance. However, the procedures currently in place have had limited impact on raising the attendance of persistent absentees. A small proportion of families have attendance which is unacceptable and despite this being raised with them it is not improving sufficiently. School data shows that there is a direct correlation between the attendance of these pupils and their rates of progress and attainment.

The schools procedures to safeguard pupils are up to date and constantly reviewed by the IEB.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher and the headteacher of school have formed an effective team. They have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and have been successful in improving teaching and learning across the school. Their efforts to develop middle leaders within the school have been well received. A carefully thought out programme of professional development, coaching and mentoring has enabled more staff to take on

management roles. Most effective has been the development of subject leaders who are now driving improvement within their subjects in English and mathematics. They are more involved in data analysis. They know the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas and they have started to monitor provision and learning. Senior leaders are aware that more needs to be done to involve other staff in management roles to strengthen the school's capacity to improve further, but plans are in place to build on these recent successes.

The curriculum is improving with a better focus on basic skills and improved opportunities to practise these in other areas of learning. Pupils say that there are more visits and visitors to the school which are promoting pupils' understanding of community cohesion. The 'learning links' initiative is providing more and exciting extra-curricular activities and these are well attended and appreciated by parents and carers. However, the school still needs to ensure that the curriculum overview underpins pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development more explicitly in the topics and areas of learning that it provides.

The provision and resources in the two Early Years Foundation Stage classes are a barrier to learning for these children. There are plans for a new build in the future for the temporary Nursery building. However, currently, resources are tired and uninspiring and the outdoor area is not fit for purpose in some weathers. Also there is restricted access from the classroom to the Reception outdoor area. This means that sometimes in the Reception class activities are too teacher-directed and there are too few meaningful links between different areas of learning to inspire children to initiate learning for themselves. Senior leaders are aware of this and are liaising with the local authority to rectify the problem.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

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

External support

The IEB is an effective body which is fully involved in the school. Since the last visit they have further improved their involvement in the monitoring of teaching and learning. They work closely with senior leaders and have encouraged middle managers in the development of their roles by requesting information and working with these staff. An exit strategy is now in place with a plan for the development of the shadow governing body and timescales for the hand over. Local authority personnel work closely with senior leaders and the IEB to provide the necessary support for the school. They are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses and broker effective support and intervention where necessary. They have been particularly successful in ensuring appropriate staffing is in place to cover staff absences; consequently pupils' learning has continued to improve.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve resources in the Nursery class.
- Develop better access to the outdoor area and make more meaningful links between different areas of learning for Reception children.