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27 April 2012

Mrs F Rigby and Mrs D Faley
Joint Acting Headteachers
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Creswick Lane
Grenoside
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S35 8NN

Dear Mrs Rigby and Mrs Faley

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Lyn Field, additional inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2011. 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 Governing Body and the Director of, Children and Young People's Directorate, Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

John Young

Her Majesty's Inspector



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2011

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate the pace of progress throughout the school in mathematics and English by making sure that teaching is consistently good and incorporates:
 - activities which match closely the abilities of all groups of pupils and which offer sufficient challenge, especially for those pupils capable of working at higher levels
 - marking which consistently informs pupils of their progress and how to move further forward in their learning
 - continuity of pupils' learning and progression, through careful planning of the curriculum.

- Increase the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels by ensuring that:
 - the school's priorities are a major focus on a daily basis and that there is a regular review of progress towards them, leading to appropriate actions
 - they have the necessary training and support to carry out their roles effectively
 - the governing body translates its comprehensive knowledge of the school into effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's priorities so that it holds leaders to account for the school's performance.



Special measures: monitoring of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 April 2012

Evidence

The inspectors carried out 15 lesson observations and assessed teaching and learning in each of the seven classes in the school. They scrutinised school documents and reports. Discussions took place with the joint acting headteachers, and other school leaders, groups of pupils, the strategic lead for primary schools in the local authority, two members from the governors' strategy group and a Catholic Diocesan representative.

Context

Since the school became subject to special measures, the headteacher and three members of the governing body, including the Chair and the vice-chair have resigned. The Year 3 and the Year 2 class teachers have also left the school. In addition, the Year 6 class teacher has been absent due to illness for several months. In January 2012, the school appointed joint, acting headteachers from another Catholic school in Sheffield (St Catherine's). Mrs Rigby works for three days a week and Mrs Faley, for two days a week. Supply teachers and a member of staff from St Catherine's are covering the vacant teaching posts. The Chair and vice-chair positions remain vacant. The deputy headteacher, who has been in post since September 2011, took over the teaching of the Year 6 class in January 2012. The school has appointed Mrs Faley, with effect from September 2012 as the sole acting headteacher for a year. As a result of the school's partnership with St Catherine's Catholic School, a joint committee of governors has been formed. This sits alongside The Governors Strategy Group, who retain overall responsibility for the school's governance. Diocesan representatives have also taken an increasingly influential role in the school's governance.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observations indicate that pupils' progress and attainment, although variable across subjects and within year groups, are showing signs of improvement in reading, writing and mathematics. This is as a result of the tailored interventions in these areas, which focus on filling the gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. The school's tracking data indicate that the pace of pupils' progress is mostly increasing, albeit from a low base line. This is helping to close the deficits between pupils' attainments and national age-related benchmarks, due to pupils' prior underachievement. The greatest gains have been secured in Year 6 where pupils' progress has improved so rapidly over the past three months that they are now on the cusp of reaching their end of Key Stage 2 targets, although further raising standards of writing remains the biggest hurdle to overcome. In contrast, it is highly unlikely that pupils in Year 2 will meet their end of Key Stage 1 targets for mathematics and writing. Elsewhere, the picture is mixed with examples of fast and slow progress. The school knows that these peaks and troughs need ironing out, and that they need to be able to identify the relative progress of the different groups of pupils the school serves, many of



whom were judged to be underperforming at the previous inspection. The school's immediate goal is to ensure Year 6 outcomes exceed the government's minimum standards for attainment and progression by the end of Key Stage 2, which it failed to do in 2011.

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

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate the pace of progress throughout the school in mathematics and English – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

The nine lesson observations, the lead inspector carried out with the acting headteachers showed that the impact of teaching on learning varies widely. There is some very effective practice which has resulted in pupils making fast progress, but this is counterbalanced by weaker and broadly satisfactory elements which are not good enough to meaningfully regain the ground lost by pupils' prior underachievement. Clearly, the turbulence in staffing has affected pupils' achievement and attitudes to learning, and the scars are particularly pronounced in some classes, where, for example, they have had three different teachers in less than a year. The school accepts that it will take consistently high quality teaching to remedy the situation. To facilitate this, leaders have instituted a comprehensive and ongoing training, coaching and mentoring programme to improve staff effectiveness, enhance their skills and boost their confidence. Staff have embraced this approach and the evidence indicates that their practice is improving as a result.

Learning was effective when staff used their good subject knowledge to build on pupils' prior learning by planning, delivering and facilitating a series of demanding and stimulating activities that were matched to pupils' differing needs and abilities. Pupils enjoyed working at pace, problem solving, practical tasks and working creatively. They liked demonstrating their understanding of new skills and thrived when they were empowered to lead their own learning and tackle challenges with confidence. Slower learning was evident when: there was a lack of focus to lessons so that they drifted and little work was produced; staff were not precise enough in ensuring pupils knew exactly what was expected of them or were unable to actively engage pupils or keep them on-task. At times, learning was inhibited by insecure subject knowledge, ineffective behaviour management or missed opportunities to consolidate pupils' understanding of key concepts and skills. Teaching assistants were observed making effective contributions to pupils' learning during the inspection.

The curriculum has been refined to offer a more systematic approach to the delivery of reading, writing and mathematics. New arrangements include the teaching of small groups of pupils selected by ability rather than age to improve the progression and continuity in their learning. This practice is proving effective and is helping to identify and resolve specific impediments to pupils' further development. The approach also gives pupils regular chances to practice, consolidate and extend key learning skills. The school recognises that the overall quality and breadth of curriculum provision needs revisiting, with some gaps apparent in the extent to which pupils explore more aesthetic and creative pursuits.



A new system of assessing, monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement has been set up, which is informing the school's intervention strategy. But, previous data are unreliable and the baseline for all assessments is the start of the Spring term. Staff are making pupils more aware of their progress and how to improve their learning further, with some evidence of evaluative comments in pupils' books which signpost the next steps in their learning. Inspectors also saw staff correcting pupils' misconceptions. Inconsistencies remain and at times marking and feedback are insufficiently detailed, contradictory and/or unhelpful.

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

- Making sure that teaching is consistently good – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say they feel safe and that usually they all get along; although they concede that occasionally there are disputes between pupils and disturbances in lessons. Inspectors found that pupils are mostly biddable and do as they are told. They are polite and the majority respond suitably to the rewards and sanctions in place to promote their good behaviour, and enjoy positive relationships with staff. However, leaders know that standards can slip if pupils are not engaged, challenged, or given enough support and guidance to succeed. At social times, pupils were seen playing happily together. Scrutiny of the recently introduced behaviour and accident logs shows that while the volume of incidents is low, there are a number of repeat offenders and some serious matters arising such as racial, physical and verbal bullying. The school has felt it necessary to introduce a detention system for pupils not adhering to the school's rules. Record keeping is becoming more robust and systematic.

Pupils' attendance and punctuality are improving and they contest the weekly class award keenly, with pupils eagerly looking forward to seeing if their class has topped the league table published in the school's newsletter. The school is working hard to raise the attendance of those pupils persistently absent but recognise there is more work to do in contacting parents and carers quickly to nip in the bud any unnecessary absence of their children.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders inspire confidence and their strategic actions and systematic rolling out of detailed improvement measures have had an instant impact, which has been underpinned by rigorous and regular monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of these actions. Clear and firm direction, including the overhauling of several school policies and practices, challenging and supporting staff to improve, and rationalising roles and responsibilities, has stabilised the school, given confidence to staff and is developing ambition and higher expectations among staff and pupils. The school's leaders know that their challenge will be to sustain, and build on, this initial impetus over time, and to embed best practice throughout the school. Nevertheless, they have made an industrious and positive start. This is despite the significant turbulence in staffing. Greater transparency around intentions and



increased involvement in decision making are empowering staff and securing an allegiance and affinity with the school's vision for the future. In particular, a number of structural and procedural changes have resulted in all staff knowing exactly what is expected of them and some positive action to improve the impact of teaching, curriculum provision, and the effectiveness of identification and intervention strategies. The school understands that much work remains to be done before the school can attest to performing effectively. Issues remain around the variable impact of teaching and patterns of pupils' attainments and achievements, the breadth and quality of the curriculum and the extent to which members of the governing body are strategically influential enough. Even so, some effective partnerships and the systematic implementation of suitable strategies are giving the school's improvement a momentum which has led to progress in each of the key priorities for improvement. Self-evaluation is frank and realistic.

Governance is currently in a state of transition following a number of departures. Members of the strategy group display a strong commitment and determination to strategically influence the school's recovery, while accepting that they should have been more proactive in recognising and acting upon concerns they had about the school's declining academic standards over time. They have existing systems and structures to monitor, challenge and support the school but these require further refinement. Members of the governing body recognise that they need to be much more informed and discerning in interrogating and interpreting the evidence presented to them by senior leaders. They acknowledge that they would benefit from training to aid them in formulating a range of specific key questions that would allow them to dig beneath the surface of each key issue and gain a more thorough and reliable evaluation of the quality of the school's work. They also recognise that the development and implementation of a comprehensive calendar of specific monitoring and evaluation activities to check progress against priority areas would facilitate their objectives.

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

- Increase the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels – satisfactory

External support

Representatives from the Catholic Diocese of Hallam have intervened to provide a range of support, guidance and funding to aid the school's improvement. The local authority is giving strategic advice in commissioning resources. Their statement of action is fit for purpose and provides a useful framework for assessing the impact of the school's work to tackle the key issues from the last inspection. The school is also part of the Hallam School's Teaching Alliance and is able to draw on the specialist teaching, leadership and administrative support available to members of this Catholic family of schools. Staff from the school have also visited St Catherine's to observe and discuss planning, and teaching and learning strategies.

