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26 November 2012

Mrs Sinclair
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Old Road
Dartford
Kent
DA1 4DZ

Dear Mrs Sinclair

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Ann Sydney, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22–23 November 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2012. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time: the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Bexley.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012

- Raise achievement so that all pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1, make at least the progress expected in English and mathematics by December 2013 by:
 - improving the daily phonics sessions so pupils rapidly develop skills of listening carefully to sounds in a word to enable them to read and spell accurately and independently
 - reviewing the personal targets of pupils with special educational needs frequently enough so they all make better progress
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise practical mathematics activities linked to everyday life.

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially at Key Stage 1, so that much is good or better by December 2013 and all pupils make more rapid gains in learning by:
 - making more effective use of assessment information to plan work that is accurately matched to pupils' needs and abilities
 - giving more time for pupils to undertake independent work
 - checking in lessons that all pupils understand the work and promptly address any misunderstandings
 - enhancing teachers' skills in managing behaviour
 - ensuring that teachers' marking is used more consistently to encourage all pupils to follow up suggestions for improvement.

- Ensure all leaders and managers, including the governing body, are effective in improving the school by:
 - rigorously monitoring the quality of learning in lessons
 - ensuring agreed strategies to improve learning are effective in every class.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21–22 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject coordinators, the special educational needs coordinator, six governors, a representative of the local authority and a local leader of education. They looked at data on pupils' progress, observed teaching in all seven classes and looked at pupils' books. Three lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.

Context

Since the school was inspected there have been significant changes in staffing with the appointment of four new teachers in September. The governing body has appointed five associate members, restructured its committees and assigned individual responsibilities so that it is now better placed to challenge senior leaders and hold the school more effectively to account.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Because teaching has improved pupils across the school are achieving more in lessons. The rate of pupils' progress is accelerating and in all classes pupils are doing at least as well as one would expect. In many they are doing better than this.

Children make good progress in the Reception class. The most recent published results for pupils in Year 2 indicate that overall they are doing as well as most pupils of their age. They do best in reading and least well in writing. Pupils in Year 6 did much better than most pupils nationally. They did particularly well in English, with an above average proportion reaching the higher Level 5. Reading is a strength of the school. However, some pupils made less progress than they should, although those supported through the pupil premium made good progress.

The school's tracking data indicate that pupils are now making better progress than at the time of the last inspection. This is because the uneven progress seen then has been eradicated. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making similar progress in English and mathematics to other pupils. This positive

picture is consistent with the better progress observed in lessons. In all classes pupils are now doing as well as one would expect, and in many, progress is good or better. Scrutiny of pupils' books shows that the quality of writing is improving. Pupils with special educational needs are doing better because of more effective target setting and regular reviews of progress. The early impact of improved teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) is evident in pupils' improved spelling. In Year 2, even where spellings are incorrect the pupils' attempts are usually phonetically plausible. Pupils are confident to have a go at difficult words. Progress is most rapid when teachers have high and explicit expectations and allow pupils time to answer rather than answering their own questions or providing too much information themselves.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved hugely. No teaching is inadequate and an increasing proportion is good or better. As a result pupils across the school are making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Where teaching is best teachers have high levels of subject knowledge which they communicate very well to pupils who talk with confidence about improving their writing through using compound sentences, conjunctions and similes. In most lessons resources are well organised and readily accessible so that pupils are beginning to develop independence. Pupils have more opportunities to practise practical mathematics activities linked to everyday life. In the best lessons learning is very well structured so that learning proceeds at a rapid pace in a carefully planned sequence of activities. These are linked by a common theme and assessed by the teacher as the lesson proceeds. Teachers make frequent reference to 'learning walls' which display helpful guidance and exemplification. Pupils make frequent and effective use of these to reinforce their learning. In less effective lessons teachers make lots of new teaching points but fail to make the connection between them clear.

Pupils work very well together in groups and pairs. Some teachers have become skilled in using collaborative working to enable pupils to revise prior learning, discuss their work and assess their progress. Teachers sometimes do too much of the talking themselves. Teachers and other adults support learning well. They move quickly and unobtrusively around the classroom seeing that pupils understand what they are doing and checking on progress. Because relationships are strong pupils are eager and responsive learners. Teachers and other adults are very supportive and encouraging so that pupils are confident to answer questions and take risks when exploring exciting and demanding vocabulary. Teachers' comments are consistently encouraging and tell pupils what is going well. Not all marking is sufficiently focused on telling pupils what they need to do to improve their work or how to reach their targets. Where this does happen teachers do not always comment on whether their advice is being acted on. Pupils know their targets for

improvement and are very clear about how well they are doing against these. Some are able to explain how their current work can help them demonstrate progress against the targets but others are not sure what they need to do to reach them.

In the best lessons there is a real sense of fun which harnesses pupils' eagerness to learn very effectively. Teachers are reflective and keen to improve. They welcome feedback on how well they are doing and act promptly on advice provided.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour has improved and is almost always at least good. Pupils concentrate well on their learning and retain a good focus on their work. They are eager to learn and when teaching is of high quality there is a real sense of fun and shared endeavour. Pupils support one-another very well. This applies both to their learning and to relationships. They are confident, welcoming and polite. They readily hold the door open for visitors, adults and each other. This is in part because all of the adults who work in the school are very good role models, treating pupils with the care and respect they deserve. Attendance is above average and punctuality is good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher provides caring, ambitious and increasingly effective leadership. She monitors the quality of teaching and learning frequently and accurately. She has a clear vision of school improvement through high quality teaching and is determined to achieve it. The senior leadership team has been strengthened through the appointment of an experienced teacher to lead assessment, but not all members are sufficiently clear about the role they play in the strategic management of the school or their role in improvement planning. Subject leaders, such as those for English and mathematics, relish the additional responsibilities and enhanced role in monitoring achievement in their subjects. They say they feel well supported in taking on these enhanced roles. Teachers are very positive about the progress the school is making and how well it is doing.

Progress with the school's improvement plan is carefully monitored by the governing body, diocese and local authority. Governors ask probing questions about how well pupils are doing and why decisions are made. They have recently assumed individual responsibility for monitoring specific aspects of the school's work such as pupils' behaviour and achievement. Improvement planning is well structured and explicit with regard to the timing of actions. It is less clear about the expected impact of some actions on pupils' progress. Overall the school improvement plan is an effective document for promoting and monitoring the school's progress.

The school has reinforced the partnership with parents. It has introduced a range of workshops to explain its work and encourage parents to support their children's learning at home. The recent session on phonics was well supported and enthusiastically received.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Staff training is up to date and the register of those able to work with children is well maintained.

External support

The local authority has provided effective and well-focused support through its statement of action. It has been responsive to requests for advice while correctly investing strategic management of the process in the school. It has brokered additional support for leadership and management from a local leader of education. The school has greatly valued support from local authority advisors to improve areas such as phonics, writing and the quality of teaching. The focus group, managed by the local authority, is providing effective strategic monitoring.