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31 January 2013

Mrs D Faley
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Creswick Lane
Grenoside
Sheffield
S35 8NN

Dear Mrs Faley

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

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 January 2013, 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 third 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualification:

- that the school provides them with regular support and guidance from a designated mentor.

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 Interim Executive Director Children Young People and Families, Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

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 third monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 January 2013

Evidence

The inspector evaluated teaching and learning in each of the seven classes in the school and scrutinised pupils' books. He held discussions with: the headteacher and deputy headteacher; groups of pupils; a local authority representative; members of the governors' strategy group and a Catholic Diocesan representative. The inspector also examined school development plans and monitoring and evaluation records.

Context

Since the second monitoring inspection the school has appointed the acting headteacher as the permanent headteacher. The school has also made permanent the position of a temporary teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage. During this monitoring visit there was a supply teacher covering the Year 3 class as the Year 3 teacher is currently absent due to illness.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The encouraging headline for the school is that there is very clear evidence of continued improvement in all groups of children and pupils' rates of progress and, as a consequence, pupils' levels of attainment are rising throughout the school. The challenge facing the school is to accelerate slower progress where it remains, ensure that all groups of pupils' are working at age-related expectations and to increase the proportions of pupils operating beyond the usual expectations. While securing fast progress in writing remains somewhat of an Achilles' heel, the trend is upward.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The quality of teaching

The main message is better consistency and further improvement in the quality of teaching throughout the school and staff are to be congratulated for this. For the first time since monitoring of the school began in April 2012, no inadequate lessons were witnessed. Generally, classrooms are a hive of activity with staff providing pupils with engaging and challenging activities which stimulate them to develop their knowledge and understanding of key concepts and skills in a range of subjects. Some high-quality work was seen from teaching assistants when they were supporting targeted pupils. The school's marking and feedback policy is embedded

and routinely applied by staff. As a result, lessons are more interactive with better questioning and an increased focus on learning. Having said this, some inconsistency remains and the school's leaders recognise that these anomalies need to be eradicated, as on occasion well-conceived learning intentions are not matched by actual practice and outcomes. Similarly, there are still some variations in the quality of feedback and the extent to which activities meet pupils' individual needs. The main challenge for the school is to ensure that the very best practice in the school, which is of a high quality, becomes the norm in every classroom.

The wider curriculum continues to be expanded with an increased number of visits and visitors and opportunities for pupils to compete for the school, develop a leisure interest or boost their literacy skills. The quality of teaching in areas other than literacy and numeracy is also improving. For example, during the inspection the inspector and headteacher saw strong delivery of music and geography.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- making sure that teaching is consistently good – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' observed behaviour in the classroom and their conduct at social times during the inspection did not concern the inspector and was largely positive. However, this picture was contradicted to a certain extent by the inspectors' scrutiny of the school's incident, accident and behaviour logs which continue to show that, although the number of incidents is receding, there are still a number of physical incidents, episodes of inappropriate behaviour and some repeat offenders.

Pupils' overall rates of attendance and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains an area of concern for the school. A variety of actions have been taken to address these issues but have not been sufficiently effective to date.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher model some good practice in teaching and leadership. They have formed a strong alliance and are working more autonomously and effectively in driving school improvement as the degree of external support retreats. There has been a significant shift in the mind-set of staff as the whole ethos and culture of the school are evolving to a more ambitious and pupil-centred environment. Improvement strategies are showing signs of impact and many aspects of the school's work are getting better, most notably, the effectiveness of teaching and the resultant increase in pupils' achievement. Staff are being held more rigorously to account and the launch of several new procedures, such as staff codes of conduct and progress-linked performance management targets, emphasise the corporate responsibility staff have to ensure the school meets the highest standards in everything it does. Senior leaders, staff and everyone involved in working to

improve the school deserve credit for the distance travelled so far, which leaves the school on the cusp of exiting the special measures category strongly subject to continued further improvement in key areas by the time of the next monitoring inspection.

Members of the governing body are wielding an increasingly effective strategic influence on the school as it moves decisively towards the point where it is ready to exit the special measures category. Support and challenge are significantly more robust and governors have a very clear picture of the school's current effectiveness and what remains to be done in order for the school to improve further.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels – good

External support

The Catholic Diocese of Hallam continues to exert an effective and invaluable strategic influence on the school's journey out of special measures. The local authority input has centred purposefully on developing the quality of curriculum provision. The relationship with the partner school continues to be beneficial.