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3 July 2015

Mrs Janet Tuck
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
High Street
Newport
PO30 1NR

Dear Mrs Tuck

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Caroline Dulon, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 July 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection in November 2014. 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.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection who must be mentored by a member of staff from the federated school.

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, the Diocese of Portsmouth and the Director of Children's Services for the Isle of Wight.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Increase the rate and consistency of the progress made by all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - leaders and teachers make better use of achievement information to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what the pupils are capable of achieving, particularly the most able
 - pupils are more motivated to complete work to a high standard which reflects their ability
 - pupils have sufficient time and encouragement to act upon the advice given in marking and other feedback so that they can improve their work.

- Improve teaching so that it is typically good across all year groups, by:
 - making sure that teachers plan work which interests and challenges all groups of pupils, including in the early years provision
 - using questioning more effectively to check how well pupils understand what they are learning, and adjust what pupils are doing, where necessary
 - ensuring that pupils are encouraged to develop greater perseverance with tasks which they find difficult
 - ensuring that classroom-based teaching assistants are clear about what is expected of them and make a consistently effective contribution to raising standards
 - ensuring that all marking is effective in helping pupils to improve their work.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management across the school, by:
 - more accurately analysing the information the school already has about how well pupils are achieving and making sure that any issues this raises are acted upon in a timely manner
 - developing more sharply focused plans to tackle key issues for improvement, and checking more frequently that these plans are having the necessary impact
 - holding teachers to account more rigorously for the progress pupils make
 - making sure that all middle leaders are given the necessary training and support to contribute effectively to school improvement
 - making sure that any incident of misbehaviour and bullying, and the actions taken, are recorded more systematically
 - making sure that governors challenge the school about its performance most robustly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 July 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority. In the absence of the English leader, inspectors met an assistant headteacher from the federated primary school who is supporting leadership of English. Pupils' writing and mathematics books were scrutinised in Years 1 to 6. Reading was not a main focus on this visit. Inspectors talked to pupils during lessons and breaks. They examined a range of documentation, including the school's information on pupils' progress, leaders' records of their monitoring activities, behaviour and safety documents, improvement plans and governors' records.

Context

At the time of the visit, two classes were being taught by temporary teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment is showing some improvement. More children are leaving Reception with good levels of development than last year. In Year 1, pupils' knowledge of phonics is picking up. Attainment is set to rise at Year 6, especially in writing and mathematics, with a marked increase at the higher Level 5. However, attainment is not improving enough by Year 2. Reading and mathematics have shown a decline from last year with a sharp dip in girls' reading. Attainment for disadvantaged pupils is starting to improve at both key stages, particularly at Year 6. Within this overall picture, there are some positive signs of improvement but there is more to do. In this school, leaders and teachers should be aiming for higher standards by Year 6 and more consistent progress in each year group.

Senior leaders have set up appropriate procedures for checking each pupil's progress at set points during the year. The records give a clear overview of the pupils who are doing well and those who are not in reading, writing and/or mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs are receiving more tailored support to address the gaps in their learning as well as their individual needs. These developments are steps in the right direction but they are still in the early stages and need to become more embedded before they bring about consistent achievement.

More-able pupils' progress remains inadequate. Their progress is better in Year 5 in writing and mathematics, and in Year 6 in mathematics, though not in writing. In Years 2 and 3, more-able pupils make slow progress in writing and mathematics. Although progress is steady in Years 1 and 4, it is not accelerating quickly enough.

The quality of teaching

The curriculum has been adapted to provide more interest for pupils, which is having a positive effect on their motivation. Teachers have planned topics to capture pupils' interest with titles such as, 'May the force be with you' and 'Message in a bottle'. Each new theme starts with a special event, such as a visit, to encourage pupils' enthusiasm for learning. The changed curriculum is a positive development.

The various themes provide opportunities for pupils to write in different ways, including letters, stories and instructions. However, in most classes teachers do not yet provide enough opportunities for pupils to practise this important skill or to write at length. In several classes, pupils do not write frequently enough and there are some long gaps between pieces of work. This fluctuation in teachers' expectations and in the quality of their planning is yet not supporting accelerated progress in writing, which is too dependent upon which class they happen to be in. Pupils' progress in mathematics is a little more consistent because tasks are usually adapted to take account of their different abilities. Nevertheless, pupils' work rate is slower than it should be in some classes. The strengths in teaching in Year 6, noted at the section 5 inspection, have not been sustained. These pupils' learning has not moved on strongly enough this term in both writing and mathematics, particularly since the national tests and assessments in May.

Teachers' questioning remains a weakness. Training on using questions effectively has not had enough impact. Teachers are not yet drawing on a range of questioning techniques to support good learning. During this visit, there were many occasions when teachers missed opportunities to check pupils' understanding and adjust their teaching accordingly. Although they questioned pupils on an individual basis, in mathematics lessons for instance, they did not always check that the other pupils in the class were concentrating, listening and understanding the concept. This also applied when individuals, or pairs, were asked to explain how they had worked out a problem or calculation. Teachers did not check the understanding of other pupils, or probe mathematical understanding or reasoning. Some teaching assistants are now being used well to help pupils learn. Others are still not sufficiently clear about what is expected of them and they do not make a strong enough contribution to learning.

Senior leaders have set expectations for how work will be marked but these are not being followed or met in all classes. In some classes, marking is showing signs of improvement. In these cases, teachers are starting to give pupils detailed feedback

about their work, enabling the pupils to use their advice to make improvements. In other classes, marking is less helpful and too intermittent.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes have improved. No inappropriate behaviour was observed on this visit. Across the school, pupils now listen carefully to their teachers and follow instructions. Even when pupils do not understand entirely what they have to do, or teachers have not explained tasks well enough, or activities have gone on for too long, they try hard to complete their work.

Senior leaders have rectified the weaknesses relating to how behaviour and bullying incidents are acted upon and recorded. Systems are now in place to monitor pupils' behaviour and there are clear routines for recording such incidents. Pupils are happy that any issues that arise are dealt with and taken seriously.

Attendance has improved this year and is likely to be above average. Attendance has been best in Years 2 and 4 but below average in Years 1 and 5.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have rightly concentrated on improving the quality of teaching. Some weaker teaching has been tackled successfully. The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher have visited other schools to learn from good practice, and some appropriate changes have been put into place. Leaders are now making better use of the information from pupils' ongoing assessments, for example, to identify individual pupils who should be making better progress. Through regular progress reviews, teachers are more aware of the pupils who need to catch up quickly. In this way, teachers are increasingly being held to account for their pupils' progress. Links have been set up with teachers from the federated primary school to provide additional support, for example when planning themes or moderating pupils' work.

The move to provide individual coaching for teachers is appropriate, to run alongside the generic training for all teachers. However, more needs to be done to follow up any training to make sure that it is working successfully in all classes. The training on questioning is a case in point. The quality of monitoring, by middle and senior leaders, is showing some improvement but is not yet rigorous enough to pinpoint specific aspects that need to improve in each class. Leaders' monitoring needs to be thorough and shine the spotlight on how well pupils are learning so that any future training can be tailored precisely to what each teacher needs to improve. Although there is some evidence that some leaders are considering learning when checking teaching, this is not yet happening in sufficient depth and is by no means routine or widespread. There is little sign of any development points being followed up on subsequent observations from leaders' records.

A positive start has been made to improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs. The leader who has responsibility for this group has been in post for a relatively short period but has accomplished a lot. She has used her experience and expertise well and has responded promptly to the findings of the local authority's review of special educational needs. This leader demonstrates a sense of urgency when discussing her work, showing a clear determination to improve provision for these pupils. For example, if a review of extra support shows it is not working well, changes are made.

Middle leaders are receiving training and support to enable them to have a stronger influence on pupils' learning and achievement. This aspect is still at an early stage and needs to be given greater priority during the autumn term, particularly for mathematics.

The school's plans for improvement have been tightened up since the first monitoring visit. The English improvement plan is focused and specific and is being regularly evaluated to find out where actions need to be revised. The English leader has received good support from the assistant headteacher from the federated school to formulate this plan and put it into practice. The shortcomings in the school's overarching plan for improvement are not as evident as they were at the first monitoring visit. It is much improved. However, it now needs refocusing to take account of what is working well, what is not and what needs attending to with more urgency. Timescales are not always clear to show when actions will start and finish. This is important so that those monitoring and evaluating each priority know what should be expected and by when.

Governance is becoming more effective. Following the local authority's two reviews of governance and the way the pupil premium is used, governors have produced a clear plan of action. They have taken steps to find out more about the school's work and have increased their knowledge about pupils' attainment and progress. Governors now meet more regularly. Visits have increased and they have adopted a systematic approach to observing key events, such as teachers' training sessions and feedback sessions from the local authority's advisors and inspectors. Governors now know a lot more about what is happening to improve the school. They still need to take more of a strategic lead, asking leaders challenging questions to find out what is working well, what is not and, importantly, why. Governors keep a close eye on their own development plan. They do not, however, keep similar oversight of the school's main plan for improvement to check that any milestones and timelines are being followed and to assure themselves there is no slippage.

External support

The local authority has provided considerable support for the school. Both reviews that were required to be set up, from the section inspection, were completed quickly. Governors have made a good start responding to the recommendations. The support from the local authority has focused primarily on English, mathematics and special educational needs. This aligns well with the areas the school needs to improve. While there are some signs of impact, particularly in relation to special educational needs, there is more to do to promote greater consistency in teaching and achievement. The local authority's review in April came at a useful time in the school's journey of improvement. It rightly highlighted some of the issues in teaching. The strategy group, which oversees the school's improvement, is monitoring the school's improvement on a regular basis.