



4 July 2005

Mrs L Fairhurst
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
High Street
Carisbrooke
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1NR

Dear Mrs Fairhurst

Implementation of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Gehane Gordelier HMI and Robert Ellis HMI to your school on 22 and 23 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress overall since becoming subject to special measures. The school's draft action plan is satisfactory, but has yet to be ratified by the governing body.

The LEA's statement of action is reasonable. The LEA's target date of spring 2006 for the removal of special measures is realistic.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers and has agreed to undertake training and support as required.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Strategic Director of Education and Community Development for the Isle of Wight and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Portsmouth. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 12 lessons or parts of lessons, two registration sessions and two class assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the school leader, curriculum co-ordinators, class teachers, four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the principal inspector head of learning effectiveness from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with pupils and samples of their work were examined. A range of documents and statistical data were scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the acting headteacher, governors, including the chair of the governing body, the principal inspector head of learning effectiveness from the LEA and a representative from diocesan board.

The action plan systematically addresses all the key issues. The actions are well defined, detailed and generally appropriate for bringing about improvement. Success criteria are given for each key issue, are generally quantifiable, and should enable the school to measure improvement. However, the plan is challenging and will require all parties involved to co-operate and collaborate effectively in order that the school achieves its targets. The acting headteacher has a very demanding role and is identified as having responsibility for aspects of most actions. In some instances, there is not sufficient separation between the personnel leading, monitoring and evaluating the actions. The action plan does not contain a summary chart to indicate how the various actions are to be implemented over time and much of the plan is focused on the period from January to July 2005.

The LEA's statement of action identifies the support and advice already given to the school and clearly outlines future actions. The LEA will continue to support the school with the implementation of the action plan, will monitor the progress made and will provide regular monitoring reports for the LEA and the governing body.

Standards are rising. The majority of the pupils in the reception class are on course to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of their time in the Foundation Stage. There are good assessment procedures in this stage of learning and the Foundation Stage Profile is used to track pupils' progress effectively.

The quality of the work seen, as well as the provisional results for the pupils in Year 2, shows that they have made good progress. The attainment of the majority of the pupils in Key Stage 1 is now broadly in line with national expectations in English and is good for mathematics. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is helping to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics. The school has correctly identified the need to provide additional challenge for the higher attaining pupils in Year 2.

Despite the progress made by the pupils in Years 3 and 4, standards are still too low; around one in five pupils underachieve. There are missed opportunities to develop the pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum and planning does not take sufficient account of their prior knowledge, aptitudes and skills. There are now more opportunities for the pupils to undertake investigative activities in science and mathematics; however, they are not sufficiently engaged in the assessment of their learning and progress. There are too few planned opportunities for the pupils to discuss and share ideas in a structured setting. Too many of them are not confident at using the correct terminology to explain their work in art, mathematics and science and struggle to explain their thoughts and findings.

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in 11 of the 12 lessons, including four which were good. However, in three of the lessons, which were judged to be satisfactory overall, the strengths only just outweighed the weaknesses. In the most successful lessons, the teachers used assessment well to inform their planning. This enabled them to make good provision for the pupils' differing needs. In these lessons, the teachers took account of the different ways in which the pupils learn and provided an appropriate range of exciting activities. Where there were weaknesses, the teachers' expectations of what the pupils could achieve were too low and the pace of lessons was slow. Lessons were not sufficiently purposeful or meaningful to the pupils and they were not encouraged to reflect on what they were learning or their progress. At Key Stage 2, there was insufficient explicit teaching of key vocabulary. Consequently, the pupils have a limited understanding of key words and do not use correct terminology in discussions or when answering questions.

Although there is good teaching of basic skills at Key Stage 1, these skills are not sufficiently well consolidated or extended at Key Stage 2; for example, the pupils are not encouraged to apply their phonological skills to read and write new and unfamiliar words across the curriculum. Only in the best lessons are the pupils encouraged to show initiative, think creatively, solve problems and reflect on what they are learning.

Every pupil has qualitative and quantitative targets for reading, writing and mathematics. The progress the pupils make towards these targets is reviewed every half term and shared with parents and the pupils themselves. The progress that pupils make towards meeting their targets is good in reception and at Key Stage 1, but limited for a significant number of pupils at Key Stage 2.

The majority of the pupils are enthusiastic learners; however, they are often reluctant to engage in challenging activities and are not confident about the benefits of learning from their mistakes. The school has correctly identified the need to raise the pupils' aspirations and develop their skills, enabling them to work independently. The pupils enjoy working in pairs and in group activities and benefit from sharing ideas and strategies. There is now systematic teaching of ICT skills and this is beginning to have a positive impact on the pupils' learning across the curriculum.

The leadership and management of the school is satisfactory overall. The acting headteacher and school leader provide a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school. Their respective roles are well understood by the staff. The senior management team has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and is developing appropriate systems to help to secure continued improvement. The senior managers undertake regular classroom observations, scrutinise samples of the pupils' work and monitor the teachers' planning. The teachers are set appropriate targets to help them to improve their practice and are more accountable for the pupils' progress. There is more rigorous use of assessment data. This is providing a sharper focus on the areas for improvement; for example, where the pupils are underachieving. However, effective use of this data to inform planning is not yet embedded throughout the school.

The roles and responsibilities of the co-ordinators for special educational needs and ICT are developing well. However, there are still areas within the foundation subjects which are not being sufficiently well co-ordinated or managed. There is insufficient distributive leadership among staff, with the leadership team undertaking too much.

Links with other schools are being used creatively to support the management of subject areas, to improve levels of resourcing and to support the professional development of staff. The newly qualified teacher has received good support from the school leader and the LEA's induction programme.

There is currently a review of the timings of the school day. There is appropriate consultation taking place with parents and governors in order to make the required changes by September 2006.

Governance is effective. The governors have developed their role of critical friend and are holding the school properly to account for the standards it achieves.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in most lessons. Their attitudes to learning were directly influenced by the quality of the teaching they received. Positive attitudes to learning were encouraged in lessons where the teachers recognised and rewarded positive behaviour and where the teaching motivated and engaged the pupils.

Where the teaching was less successful, there were instances of minor disruptive behaviour and the pupils were unable to sustain their concentration for extended periods without adult intervention. A few pupils had insufficient awareness of others and continued to chatter or interrupt when the teacher or fellow pupils were speaking.

Attendance has fallen from well above average to 94.1 per cent and is now broadly in line with the national average for maintained primary schools.

The overall provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good. They play well together and many participate in organised games at playtimes. Daily assemblies provide good opportunities for prayer, reflection and discussion.

The school pays appropriate regard to the pupils' health, safety and well-being. Adults are readily available at playtimes and the pupils feel that they are approachable and are confident to turn to them for help.

The effective use of the school council enables the pupils to have a greater influence on school life. Their views and opinions are sought and this enhances the pupils' sense of being valued and respected.

Support for the pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory. The teachers are well informed about the needs of individual pupils and individual education plans are regularly reviewed.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets national requirements. The planned reorganisation from five to four classes in September 2005 will result in two mixed-age classes and the school is at the early stages of planning appropriate schemes of work to ensure continuity and progression.

Advisers and consultants have provided good support for some aspects of the school's work. However, there has been some discontinuity with the level of support from a link inspector. This is currently being addressed by the LEA.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve the leadership and management of the school, including systems for monitoring provision and identifying and addressing weaknesses

This action has been discussed above.

Progress is reasonable.

2: raise standards across the whole school and improve achievements in reading, writing, mathematics, science and ICT

This action has been discussed above.

Progress is reasonable.

3: raise standards in Reception and improve pupils' achievement by improving teaching, learning, the curriculum and assessment

This action has been discussed above.

Progress is good.

4: improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the management of pupils in Years 3 and 4

This action has been discussed above.

Progress is limited.

Statutory requirements identified in the inspection of December 2004 have been successfully addressed. However, the current job description for the acting headteacher does not fully reflect her role and responsibilities and does not take sufficient account of the Every Child Matter's agenda.