



16 June 2005

Mrs R Palmer
Acting Headteacher
St Mary of Charity CE Primary School
Orchard Place
Faversham
Kent
ME13 8AP

Dear Mrs Palmer

Implementation of St Mary of Charity CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Linda McGill HMI and Maureen York HMI to your school on 23 and 24 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: 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 limited progress since the last monitoring inspection and limited progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Strategic Director – Education and Libraries for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF ST MARY OF CHARITY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 18 parts of lessons, two registration sessions and two assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, the chair and vice chair of governors and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair and vice chair of the governing body and representatives from the LEA and the Diocese of Canterbury.

At the time of this monitoring inspection, the headteacher was absent. The deputy headteacher is acting as headteacher, and has been released from classroom teaching duties in order to carry out the work. One other teacher was absent and there are currently three other teachers working at the school who are on temporary or supply contracts. However, the school expects to have a full complement of permanent staff at the start of the new school year in September.

Standards were generally below what is expected for the pupils' ages in lessons in English and mathematics, but closer to what is expected in other lessons. In the Foundation Stage, a significant proportion of the pupils has poorly developed language and social skills and they are unlikely to achieve the nationally expected goals in communication, language and literacy by the end of the year. This low attainment continues through Key Stage 1 and by Year 2, although some pupils write simple sentences and use appropriate punctuation, or classify three-dimensional shapes according to their properties, a significant proportion has not yet reached this standard. In Key Stage 2, standards in lessons were closer to what is expected, but each class contained a significant number of pupils whose attainment was below or well below this.

The teachers have recently begun to talk with the pupils about their attainment and the steps they need to take to move up to the next National Curriculum level; for example, targets and strategies to bring about improvement are pasted in the pupils' literacy books. However, the use of these targets to inform the plans for lessons is limited, and not all of the teachers have been systematic in following them up with the pupils and documenting their achievements in relation to them. The pupils do not talk confidently about their targets or the levels they are working towards.

The pupils made satisfactory or better progress in 13 of the lessons, including three lessons where their progress was good. Unsatisfactory progress was linked to weaknesses in the teaching and to the pupils' attitudes to their work. In some lessons, it was clear that the pupils had difficulty in recalling previous work, which

hindered their progress. The teachers did not always pick up on these gaps, which led to some pupils struggling with their independent work. In contrast, in other lessons where the previous work had engaged their interest and enthusiasm, the pupils had a secure understanding of the topic they were studying and answered questions in a thoughtful and knowledgeable way; for example, when comparing the lives of rich and poor people in Tudor times. In one instance, despite good and lively teaching, the pupils' progress was slow because they were reluctant to enter into the spirit of the lesson. Overall, the pupils are not making swift enough progress to help them make up ground they have lost.

The quality of teaching remains unsatisfactory. It was satisfactory or better in 13 lessons and it was unsatisfactory or poor in five. Very good teaching was seen in a reception class and in Year 3. The teaching was better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1.

Where the teaching was good, the pupils understood the learning objective because it was written in language they could understand and the teacher used it to explain what they would be learning, rather than doing. The pupils talked about what they were doing with enthusiasm. The lesson-planning was effective and enabled all pupils to make progress during the lesson. The teaching was purposeful and pupils responded by remaining focused on their tasks. The teachers used effective strategies such as "talk partners" and their questions were challenging. They also valued the pupils' responses.

Effective concluding plenary sessions built on this well by helping the pupils to review what they had learned and comment on what they might have done differently. The pupils were able to suggest how they might improve in future. The pupils were given tasks which matched their learning needs and the teaching assistants were clear about their contribution to the pupils' learning.

Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the lessons were not planned carefully enough to ensure that the tasks were suitably matched to the pupils' abilities. Not all teachers made effective use of assessment information to guide them in planning for the next steps in the pupils' learning. Sometimes, there was a single learning objective for the whole class, even though some pupils were clearly not ready to work at this level. Too often the learning objectives were descriptions of the activities rather than an explanation of what the pupils would learn. Consequently, individuals' needs were not met and the teaching assistants were not deployed effectively. The teachers used a narrow range of questioning techniques, asking pupils what they remembered but not challenging or extending their understanding. The more reluctant pupils were left on the fringes of the lesson and were not encouraged to respond. Concluding plenary sessions rehearsed what the pupils had done rather than checking on their learning.

The quality of marking varied widely. Some teachers gave the pupils pointers as to how their work might be improved but there were too many examples of work being ticked with little or no comment.

The pupils' attitudes and their behaviour were satisfactory or better in all of the lessons and they were very good in two, where the teaching was most effective. At best, the pupils were enthusiastic, responsive and keen to learn, but often they were rather passive; they listened respectfully to the teacher and generally concentrated on the tasks but asked few questions and showed little curiosity.

Attendance has improved since the last monitoring visit and at 94.8 per cent is much closer to the national average. During the spring term 2005 there were 12 fixed-term exclusions; this is an increase on the figures for the previous term.

At the moment, the deputy headteacher is providing effective leadership and has brought a better sense of direction and purpose to the school's work. This has been welcomed by the staff. Middle managers report that there is more of a corporate ethos and a willingness to take on new initiatives. However, the amount of training, new initiatives and classroom observations has been high, and not all staff have fully embraced the need for change. This has led to some inconsistencies in how new approaches have been implemented.

The governing body is steadily developing its role in keeping the school's progress under review, and receives regular reports from the headteacher and deputy headteacher. A rationale for governors' visits to school has been drawn up and, when implemented, should strengthen the governors' understanding of the school's work. Training provided by the LEA has been well received and further training is planned.

The LEA has continued to give the school a high level of support which has included training, advice and classroom observations. This work has focused clearly on areas where improvement is needed and has helped some teachers to improve their practice, but the different inputs have not always built on what was done before or allowed sufficient time for them to be consolidated before other initiatives are introduced. Subject co-ordinators have valued the support and guidance they have received, but there is limited evidence of the impact of the LEA's input on the work of individual teachers.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: strengthen leadership and management at all levels, especially the procedures to monitor teaching and learning and the priority given to raising standards

The members of the senior leadership team are developing their roles steadily and lines of communication have improved; the weekly phase meetings help to keep all staff informed of developments as well as improving consistency of approach. Senior staff and middle managers have carried out a programme of lesson observations and provided teachers with feedback on their strengths and areas for

improvement. This has been useful. The lesson observation notes are not all equally rigorous, and although the observers have used the published criteria for judging teaching and learning as a guide, there has been insufficient emphasis on evaluating the impact of the teaching on the pupils' learning and progress when coming to conclusions about lessons. Nevertheless, there is a good understanding of where strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie.

In recent weeks, there has been a clearer sense of direction and purpose to the school's work, and improvements have gained momentum. However, progress since the school has been in special measures has been too slow, and the school has not achieved its targets for teaching and learning which the action plan includes as a key indicator of improvement in leadership and management.

Overall, progress on this area for improvement is limited.

2: improve teaching and learning, especially in Years 1 and 2

The school, with the support of the local authority, is following a programme of classroom observations but, as reported above, there is not yet a sufficient emphasis on checking the impact of teaching on the pupils' learning. The quality of teaching has not improved sufficiently in Key Stage 1. There is both an assessment policy and a marking policy to guide the teachers' work, but they are not consistently used by all staff.

Progress on this area for improvement is limited.

3: raise standards and the achievement of pupils in literacy, numeracy and science throughout the school

The school has continued to work on developing its procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and tracking their progress, but the systems are not yet firmly established. The subject co-ordinators report that the various initiatives undertaken to improve the teachers' skills and knowledge have had a positive impact on standards, but there is as yet little firm evidence of improvements in standards or accelerated progress. The school is optimistic that there will be improvements in the test results for the pupils in Year 6 this year.

Co-ordinators intend to carry out detailed analyses of the results of the recent statutory and non-statutory tests when they become available, and this information will be supplemented with the outcomes of the teachers' assessments of the progress the pupils make each half term. This should give teachers more precise information about progress and inform the selection of groups of pupils for particular intervention programmes. This important part of the school's work has been slow to come to fruition. The use of day-to-day assessments of learning and progress is not a common feature and this requires attention.

As part of the performance management arrangement for teachers, the pupils' progress will be checked. This is a sensible step.

Although the rate of progress has accelerated recently, overall progress on this area for improvement is limited.