



13 May 2005

Mrs L Moyes
Acting Headteacher
St Michael's CE VA First School
The Boundaries
Geldeston Road
Gillingham
Beccles
Suffolk
NR34 0HT

Dear Mrs Moyes

Implementation of St Michael's CE VA First School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr A Knight HMI to your school on 3 and 4 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 reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable 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 Diocese of Norwich and the Director of Education for Norfolk. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF ST MICHAEL'S CE VA FIRST SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit eight parts of lessons, one registration session and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, subject leaders for mathematics and science, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with 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 acting headteacher, the chair of the governing body and two representatives from the LEA. The newly appointed substantive headteacher was also present.

While the school's results have been consistently below those of similar schools over recent years, standards are beginning to show signs of improvement. For example, the pupils in Years 3 and 4 made rapid progress in a mathematics lesson and showed secure understanding of the use of decimal notation in money and how multiplication is the inverse of division. In a science lesson, the pupils in Years 1 and 2 confidently identified different parts of a plant and competently used a table to record their observations. The pupils in the Foundation Stage communicated clearly and demonstrated high levels of personal and social development.

However, significant gaps in the pupils' past learning are inhibiting more consistent improvement. For example, most of the pupils in Year 2 had not mastered the basic concept of odd and even numbers and none were able to solve division questions that gave rise to remainders. Weak writing skills, particularly letter formation and spelling, hindered the progress of many pupils in Years 3 and 4.

There has been some improvement in the quality of teaching which was satisfactory or better in all lessons. Teaching was good in four lessons, including a session led by a teaching assistant, and very good in one. The quality of learning followed the same profile. The features of good teaching reported at the last inspection have continued and have been extended through the use of skilful questioning and the effective use of interactive white boards. Positive relationships between adults and pupils were seen in all lessons.

The very good teaching provided stimulating and well sequenced activities that were matched to the pupils' learning needs and consolidated and extended specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Tasks and teaching approaches were adapted skilfully to ensure every pupil increased their understanding as much as possible in the time available and this led to rapid and tangible progress. Teaching was less effective when the lesson objectives and tasks were too broad, and the focus of the lesson did not help the pupils overcome gaps in their prior learning.

Overall, the pupils' behaviour in and beyond the classroom is good and there has been a marked improvement in the pupils' attitudes to learning in Years 3 and 4. Attitudes and behaviour were always at least satisfactory and were good in three lessons, very good in one and outstanding in two. Outstanding attitudes and behaviour were shown by the pupils in Years 3 and 4. They were much more animated, constantly offering comments and posing questions to increase their own understanding and take the learning forward. They repeatedly offered their own ideas and solutions, such as suggesting an easy way to remember the nine times table. One pupil added the term adverb to the list of types of words being explored and another gave an example without being asked. They were totally committed to their learning as was demonstrated by two boys who changed partners so that they could work with more concentration, pre-empting the need for any direction from the teacher.

Very good behaviour and attitudes were also shown by pupils in the Foundation Stage who quickly stopped playing when asked, listened closely and then tidied equipment away impressively. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 were well behaved and supportive of each other but lacked confidence in their learning.

Leadership and management of the school are good overall. In addition to the greatly improved ethos and increased sense of shared responsibility, the improvement plans for English, mathematics and science are beginning to take effect. Clear targets for literacy and numeracy are displayed and pupils are aware of what they need to achieve. New curriculum experiences, such as the recent mathematics week, have increased the pupils' enjoyment of learning. A whole-school writing task and joint teacher assessment and grading of the pupils' work increased the teachers' understanding of progression and fostered meaningful educational links with the local middle school. The school's action plan has been improved and now includes a helpful timescale. The acting headteacher has developed a secure base for further improvement and all staff are contributing energetically and effectively to the ongoing development of the school.

All members of the governing body have completed their induction training. Committees have been restructured and clear responsibilities established. Monitoring reports from the LEA Regional Development Adviser have been discussed by the governing body and appropriate action instigated. This included the sensible reduction of lesson visits by governors while frequent classroom visits by LEA officers were being made. Standards and test data have been discussed and a three-year rolling programme of policy creation, monitoring and evaluation has been developed. An experienced headteacher has been appointed to lead the school from September 2005 and an effective induction process has begun.

There is much greater support for the school from parents. Nearly all of the parents spoken to would recommend the school to other parents.

The LEA has continued to provide effective support to the school.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise pupil attainment especially in English, information and communication technology and science and accelerate the progress they make

The pupils' attainment has begun to rise but the significant gaps in pupils' learning are inhibiting greater improvement. Progress is reasonable.

2: improve the quality of teaching across the school

All teaching is now satisfactory or better and classroom management is always good. However, some learning is limited by a lack of focus on specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Progress is reasonable.

3: improve the effectiveness of leadership and management of the school by ensuring that the school development plan is at the heart of the school's work and that it shows more clearly the important priorities to secure the improvement of the school

The development plan is now at the heart of the school's work and all levels of leadership and management are contributing fully and effectively to the development of the school. Progress is good.

4: further develop the partnership between school and its parents

Parents are more supportive and more actively involved in the school. Progress is good.

5: improve the effectiveness of the governing body in providing the school with clear direction and in critically evaluating its work

The governing body is providing sensitive and rigorous support for the school. Under the effective leadership of the chair of governors they have worked diligently to raise the status of the school in the local community. Progress is good.

6: improve the use of assessment data

An increasing amount of assessment data is being collected and analysed. However, insufficient areas of weakness have been identified to ensure appropriately focussed work is provided for all pupils. Progress is reasonable.