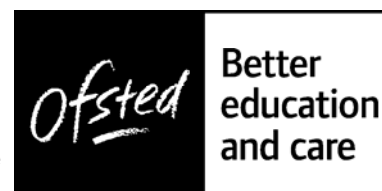


Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

T 020 8313 7760
F 020 8464 3393

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045



8 December 2005

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

Dear Mrs Fairhurst

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2004.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, including seven lessons or part lessons and one assembly. I also scrutinised documents, spoke with pupils and held discussions with you, some of the staff and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

The relatively small numbers of pupils in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1 have resulted in mixed age classes, which the school is managing well. The pupils are taught literacy and numeracy in groups set according to their ability for most of the time. They also work in year groups to ensure that pupils are taught those

aspects of the curriculum which are appropriate for their age group. The school leader is no longer teaching in Key Stage 1 and is now working in Key Stage 2.

The local authority and Diocese have approved plans to expand some of the classrooms and provide a sheltered outside play area for the Foundation Stage. The governing body will soon be voting on whether or not the school should become federated with St Mary's Catholic Primary School.

Achievement and standards

The school has made good progress overall in improving achievement in the core subjects and information and communication technology (ICT). Standards are rising throughout the school, especially in reading, writing, science and ICT and pupils are meeting their challenging targets. The 2005 test results for English and science show that the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2c or above is now broadly in line with the national average and the percentage of pupils achieving Level 3 is above the national average.

There has been an adequate focus on helping to develop the basic literacy skills of the lower attaining pupils and there is an improved level of challenge for the higher attaining pupils. However, pupils are still not sufficiently encouraged to develop and apply their phonological skills in reading and writing new and unfamiliar words.

The impact of the school's work to raise standards in mathematics has helped the vast majority of pupils to achieve the basic standard of Level 2c at the end of Key Stage 1. Progress in this subject is satisfactory overall. There is an appropriate focus on improving pupils' ability to apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding, especially in solving problems. However, this continues to be an area in need of development and there is still insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils.

The newly appointed ICT co-ordinator has helped pupils to develop a good range of skills and capabilities in the subject and pupils are beginning to apply these skills to their learning in other areas.

The school has successfully raised standards in the Reception class. The progress made in raising pupils' achievement by improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the curriculum and assessment for this year group is good and a strength of the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- raise standards across the whole school and improve achievements in reading, writing, mathematics, science and ICT – good progress in all areas except for mathematics, which is satisfactory.
- raise standards in Reception and improve pupils' achievement by improving teaching, learning, the curriculum and assessment – good progress

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory. The school's work as part of the Healthy Schools initiative has highlighted areas which need to be improved. This includes pupils having greater access to drinking water during the school day and increasing their awareness of how to live healthy lives. Pupils know they need to be careful when crossing roads and not to talk to strangers. Other aspects of promoting pupils' awareness of how to be safe are less well developed. The school has improved its programme of personal, social and health education, but this has yet to be fully implemented. The good links with the local parish and pupils' participation in the school council enable them to contribute effectively to their local community. The pupils' improved attitudes to learning and higher standards are making a positive contribution to the development of their economic well-being. Where ICT is used well, it contributes to pupils' enjoyment of learning. However, lessons at Key Stage 2 do not always include sufficient strategies to ensure that learning is enjoyable. Pupils appreciate the good range of activities available for them at playtimes.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education continues to be very good and a strength of the school. The vast majority of pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the building.

The attendance figures, although broadly average, have fallen significantly. The school is receiving good support from the newly appointed educational welfare officer (EWO) and the attendance figures are beginning to rise. There have been no exclusions in the last academic year, or since September 2005.

Quality of provision

The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Teaching is now consistently satisfactory and includes elements of good practice. The school leader is now working in Key Stage 2, which has helped to improve the overall quality of provision in Years 3 and 4. The strengths in those lessons which were judged to be satisfactory significantly outweighed the weaknesses.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen in most core subjects and the content of the vast majority of lessons is now more interesting and purposeful. This is partly due to the increase in cross-curricular links, which puts learning into a more meaningful context. There are now more opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills and work independently. The greater use of ICT is contributing significantly to their enjoyment of learning and the school's policy on inclusion. The informed use of ICT is helping to engage reluctant readers and writers. Pupils who previously displayed poor attitudes to learning are motivated and inspired by the visual impact and interactive nature of this resource.

Where there are weaknesses in lessons, teachers' subject knowledge is not sufficiently secure. Pupils are not encouraged to articulate their understanding of

what they are learning and there are missed opportunities for them to discuss their work before answering questions or beginning their tasks. In these lessons there is also a tendency for teachers to do too much of the talking and to be overly directive. The quality and use of visual aids are good in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1 but just satisfactory at Key Stage 2. This is impeding the level of engagement and enjoyment of some of the older pupils.

The management of pupils' behaviour has improved. It is good in the lower school and satisfactory at Key Stage 2. Strategies to manage pupils' behaviour are not always sufficiently positive and constructive. Where the behaviour of pupils is managed most effectively, lessons engage them as active learners and activities are enjoyable and challenging. However, pupils' ability to concentrate and remain on task is impaired when they have not been encouraged to drink enough fluids during the course of the school day.

The quality of support provided by some of the teaching assistants is variable. The school has correctly identified the need to provide them with additional professional development. Furthermore, the withdrawal of some pupils during lessons to undertake catch-up in unrelated areas of work is at times counter-productive.

Pupils identified as having special educational needs are making satisfactory progress. Teachers are making better use of assessment and data to inform their planning. There is more work provided at different ability levels to support the needs of the lower attaining pupils. However, not all staff incorporate pupils' individual targets within their planning. An example of this is the development and use of pupils' phonological skills. Not all teaching assistants encourage pupils to develop or apply these skills when they support them with their reading; pupils are still not being encouraged to recall and use their skills across the curriculum to read and write new and unfamiliar words. As a result basic skills are not taught systematically or consistently throughout the school and this is reducing the rate of progress made by some pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the management of pupils in Years 3 and 4 – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The headteacher provides good strategic leadership. This has led to much of the improvement in the quality of teaching and in standards. The management of the school in terms of helping others to develop their roles and responsibilities is satisfactory but the rate of progress in this area is slow. The headteacher and school leader are now working in closer partnership and this has helped the school leader to provide satisfactory curriculum leadership. The school makes more informed use of data to track and monitor pupils' progress. This has enabled pupils who are underachieving to receive additional support, some of which is good.

There is still an over-reliance on the headteacher to provide the overall leadership and there is insufficient input from other members of staff with areas of responsibility. The new role of the school leader as Key Stage 2 co-ordinator and the roles and responsibilities of some of the curriculum co-ordinators are underdeveloped. Subject co-ordinators are not undertaking rigorous and formal self-evaluation nor producing action plans and they are not contributing sufficiently to the school improvement process. The leadership and management are better for ICT, English, mathematics and science, but even in these areas there is a lack of rigour. Furthermore the format for recording lesson observations is weak. As a result there is insufficient emphasis on key areas in need of improvement and a lack of clarity about strengths and weaknesses.

Governors continue to be supportive of the school and act as critical friends. However, they do not always hold the school sufficiently to account for progress in areas of leadership and management.

The school's capacity to improve is reliant on the leadership of the headteacher. Despite improvements in leadership and management in the last few months, there is still insufficient distributive leadership overall. This is a key area for development in order for the school to be able to sustain improvement over time.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- improve the leadership and management of the school, including systems for monitoring provision and identifying and addressing weaknesses – satisfactory progress

External support

The quality and impact of the external support from the local authority (LA) are no longer adequate. Support for the school improvement process has been inconsistent and lacks rigour. The school has valued the informal support from the link inspector because this has helped the staff to make more informed use of data. However, the link inspector has only resumed this level of responsibility for the school in the last three weeks.

There has been insufficient communication between the school improvement team and the school. There has been one monitoring report from the LA since the end of the summer term. The report does not include a sharp enough focus on strengths and areas in need for improvement since the previous HMI visit and is not sufficiently developmental.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures and since the previous monitoring inspection is satisfactory overall.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the leadership and management role of the school leader and curriculum co-ordinators.

I am copying this letter 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.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
H M Inspector