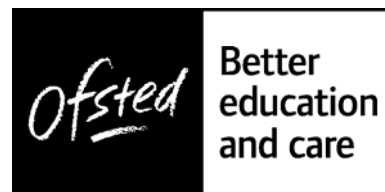


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The Appropriate Authority (through the Headteacher)

15th October 2005

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

Dear Mrs Palmer

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARY OF CHARITY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with John Collings, additional inspector, to your school on 28th and 29th September, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, members of the senior management team, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local education authority (LEA).

Context

There have been significant changes of staff since the last monitoring inspection. Several teachers have left the school and three teachers, including two who are newly qualified, have joined. There are fewer classes because the number of pupils is decreasing and there are mixed age classes in the infants and the lower years of the juniors. There is a single Reception class.

The headteacher is still absent because of illness and the deputy headteacher has continued to take on the role in an acting capacity. Major building works have begun and will last until the New Year.

Achievement and standards

Since the last monitoring inspection the school's results in tests at the end of Years 2 and 6 have become available. They give a mixed picture. The results for the seven year olds were broadly similar to last year's and remain well below the national figure in reading, writing and mathematics. It is worrying that fewer than half of the pupils attained the expected Level 2 in writing, and only one child achieved a higher level. This group of pupils included a higher proportion who have special educational needs than is typical in other years, which may have affected the test results. However, the school's assessment information is not robust enough to show that the pupils made the best possible progress over their time in the infant classes. The school fell far short of the targets set out in the post inspection action plan.

Results were more encouraging at the end of Key Stage 2 where there were significant increases in the percentages of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in English and science. The school is rightly pleased with the improvement in the number of pupils who attained Level 4 in writing and attributes the success to particular efforts which have been put into this aspect of English. In contrast, results in mathematics were about the same as last year. Just over half of the pupils gained Level 4, although about three quarters did so in English and science. The school met its targets in English and science, but fell well short of the target for mathematics.

Subject leaders have analysed the test results and the results of optional tests taken by other year groups, and steps are to be taken to tackle areas of weakness which have been highlighted. The school's plans to improve teaching and learning in writing at Key Stage 1 and pupils' basic skills in mathematics are sensible.

In lessons observed standards were generally below what is expected for pupils' ages. Pupils often lacked the basic skills that they needed to succeed in lessons. For example, many older pupils' recall of multiplication tables and related division facts was painfully slow. This hindered their work on fractions. Similarly, while many pupils had interesting ideas when writing stories, their success was marred by poor handwriting and errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

In the past the school has not made good use of the information gained from assessments of the pupils' attainments either to make sure that lessons were planned to meet pupils' different needs or to check that sufficient progress was being made over time. This is now a major thrust of the school's work. The school intends to use assessment information to set appropriately challenging targets for groups of pupils and individuals, and to check on

progress more regularly. This work is timely and necessary if underachievement is to be eradicated and progress accelerated.

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

- raise standards and the achievement of pupils in literacy, numeracy and science throughout the school – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

In observed lessons pupils had satisfactory attitudes to their work and, when the teaching engaged them, they showed some enthusiasm and interest. Some teachers, especially in the junior classes, found they had to work very hard to establish a lively atmosphere and an excitement about learning as pupils were quick to revert to passivity and compliance rather than being active participants in the lessons. Pupils do not yet fully understand the part that they have to play in their own learning. All classrooms have displays of helpful tips to encourage pupils to use initiative rather than referring to adults for help when they get stuck. However, pupils are not yet using them as a matter of course.

The pupils usually behaved acceptably. They were polite, friendly and aware of others' needs. They supported one another and cooperated in small groups. However, their attention was quick to wander both in lessons and in assembly. There have been two exclusions since the last inspection, one of which was permanent. This is less than in previous terms. The pupils' behaviour is steadily improving. At the last monitoring inspection attendance levels had risen but the overall rate for the first three weeks of this term has dropped back.

Quality of provision

There have been some improvements in the quality of teaching since the last monitoring inspection. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has reduced and good teaching has been maintained. The school's targets for teaching have not yet been met, however. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 has improved, although there are still some weaknesses in this key stage and in the Foundation Stage. Eleven parts of lessons were observed and teaching was good in four, satisfactory in five, and inadequate in two. Senior staff and LEA personnel have observed teachers at work and have provided useful feedback. The acting headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. A robust approach is being taken to tackle longer standing weaknesses. This is timely and necessary. Subject leaders and senior staff report a greater willingness amongst the staff to accept the need for change and this is evident in the consistency with which initiatives have been implemented. For example, all teachers routinely identified objectives for learning in lessons and helpfully related them to ways that the

pupils could measure their success. Marking in pupils' books also consistently referred to the learning objective, and gave helpful feedback to the pupils.

Where the teaching was good lessons were well prepared, lively and stimulating. The pupils made evident progress and built well on what they already knew. Mixed age classes have brought a new challenge because of the increased range of attainment to cater for. But, in every lesson, it was clear that the teachers had given a good deal of thought to planning activities that were suitable for the wide range of needs within their classes. This planning generally worked well, but in one lesson the younger and lower attaining pupils were expected to concentrate on their activity for too long and they became restless. In another lesson inappropriate organisation, a lack of clarity about what the pupils were to learn and how they would best be helped to do it, hindered their progress.

In the infant classes the teachers plan sessions when the younger pupils are able to choose from different activities, as they used to do in the Reception class. This is helping pupils adjust to their new classes but the provision will need to be carefully monitored to make sure that the time is used purposefully and the 'curriculum challenge' activities provided for the older pupils are sufficiently demanding.

There is a high level of support for pupils in lessons provided by classroom assistants and special needs assistants. The assistants are deployed well by the teachers, have a clear understanding of what they have to do, and give good support. However, they are not always used to best effect during whole class parts of lessons and there is scope to use their obvious skills more creatively.

As previously there has been a good deal of support for teachers provided by advanced skills teachers, advisors and consultants from the LEA. The support is now well managed by the acting headteacher and is focused on helping the teachers develop the skills they need rather than doing things for them.

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

- improve teaching and learning, especially in Years 1 and 2 – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

There have been significant improvements in this aspect of the school's work since the last monitoring inspection. There is a strong drive to make up lost ground by implementing the action plan and evaluating success. Senior staff and LEA personnel have observed lessons regularly, checking aspects of practice which are being developed and this is becoming an established part of the school's routines. As mentioned above this has given senior staff a

clear picture of strengths and weaknesses and has helped to target support where it is needed. The acting headteacher knows that raising standards at Key Stage 1 is a priority and has taken appropriate steps to strengthen the teaching in Years 1 and 2. The impact on progress and standards is not yet evident.

A more cohesive approach to improvement, a greater unity of purpose and sense of direction are evident. Staff and governors are keen to highlight their successes but are realistic in their understanding of how much remains to be done. They are aiming high, and, in response to this, the culture and ethos within the school are changing for the better. The acting headteacher is rightly delegating responsibilities to senior managers and subject leaders. She is working towards enabling them to fulfil their clearly identified roles, and for them to be accountable for their areas of responsibility. Senior staff have begun to work on developing their skills of self-evaluation, recognising that this is an aspect that requires work and is key to future success.

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

- improve leadership and management at all levels – good progress.

External support

As mentioned above, a good deal of support has been provided by the LEA. Because it is better managed and more carefully focused at particular needs, the impact is beginning to show in, for example, the greater consistency with which agreed strategies are implemented, improvements in planning, and, the growth of a more reflective approach to teaching. Support for the acting headteacher has contributed to the speed with which she has got to grips with what needs to be done next.

Main Judgements

- Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.
- Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make sure that the pupils' progress is monitored regularly.
- Take steps to tackle the weaknesses in basic skills.
- Continue to work on improving the quality of teaching, especially in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Education for Kent and the Diocese of Canterbury.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

H M Inspector