



19 April 2006

Miss L. Heneghan
Headteacher
English Martyrs' Catholic Primary
School
Dee Road
Tilehurst
Reading
RG30 4BE

Dear Miss Heneghan

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ENGLISH MARTYRS' CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Cathie Munt HMI and George Rayner AI to your school on 13 and 14 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2005.

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 held discussions with the deputy headteacher, nominated staff, the chair of governors, and the local authority school improvement adviser. The views of pupils were gathered informally. Inspectors observed 13 lessons or parts of lessons.

Context

There have been four changes of teaching staff since the inspection in September 2005. Two teachers joined in January 2006 and a further two more recently, including one who joined on the first day of this visit.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' skills on entry to the school are broadly average. Because provision in the Foundation Stage has shortcomings, children's skills are not currently being developed to ensure all children make at least satisfactory progress.

In Years 1 and 2, standards were significantly above average in 2004 but slipped to broadly average in 2005 mainly because standards dropped markedly in writing and slightly in reading. For mathematics, they have been maintained at average levels. Pupils' progress in lessons is currently satisfactory and standards are average although the school's own analysis shows that writing is still a relatively weak area.

Results in national tests for pupils in Year 6 have been significantly below average for the last three years. From 2004 to 2005, results in science went up slightly, were maintained in mathematics but dropped in English. The 2005 results showed that pupils made significantly less progress than similar pupils elsewhere. Progress in English was in the bottom 10% of schools. Standards in writing are still too low. Targets were not met in 2004 or 2005. Progress in lessons in Years 3 to 6 is generally satisfactory but uneven and linked to the quality of teaching and learning which is still variable. The targets set for 2006 are very challenging, given pupils' current standards. School predictions indicate that targets are unlikely to be met, except possibly for mathematics.

Since the inspection in September 2005, the school has improved greatly its mechanisms for tracking each pupil's progress and is able to identify clearly those pupils who are underachieving. Teachers have a reasonable understanding of what the school expects in terms of pupils' progress over a year. There is a lack of clarity in the way in which targets are set for year groups of pupils. Not all managers are adept at judging the adequacy of pupils' progress over the longer term, in relation to nationally available information.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Improve standards and ensure that all groups of pupils make the expected progress in each key stage - satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain good, as they were in September 2005. Pupils show interest and commitment to their work and are very willing to help their teachers. Pupils in Years 1 and 2, for example, showed considerable maturity in the way in which they worked together to clear up quickly after activities, so that little time was lost. The school has carefully considered comments made by a few parents during the September inspection about the way in

which it responded to their concerns about bullying and behaviour. It has developed an effective procedure for ensuring that all concerns are acted upon, that parents are consulted where appropriate about action taken, and that they receive written information about what has been done.

The school provides a good choice of healthy and tasty menu options at lunchtime and pupils speak appreciatively about this.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- no major areas were identified as needing improvement in this aspect of the school's work.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage, and satisfactory with good features in the remainder of the school. In all lessons teachers managed the pupils' behaviour effectively.

Teaching in the Foundation Stage was weaker than elsewhere because it did not take enough account of the pupils' ages and did not build sufficiently on their previous learning. In addition, in too many instances, the lack of appropriate adult intervention meant that the pupils did not make sufficient progress in the development of their skills and knowledge. Evaluation of each previous week's programme is limited. There is no formal way of ensuring or recording that pupils engage in a suitable range of activities over time.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, almost half of the teaching was good and in a Year 6 mathematics lesson it was outstanding. Two lessons in Key Stage 2 were inadequate. Other lessons were satisfactory. Where teaching was best, appropriate teaching methods were used, the pace was brisk but not rushed, work was purposeful and built on previous learning, expectations were clearly stated, organisation was unobtrusive and pupils were learning at a rate that should enable them to catch up effectively on lost ground. In the most successful lessons, teachers had high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and of their achievement. Lessons were interesting, lively and very effectively organised. Teaching captured the pupils' interest because it included a variety of strategies, presented challenging and interesting work for the various ability groups, and ensured that all pupils were fully involved in and understood the learning tasks. Planning was very clear. Teachers ensured that pupils understood the learning objectives and they referred to them during the lesson. Questioning was used effectively to develop the pupils' thinking.

In two lessons, pupils did not make as much progress as they might have because of the slow pace of teaching and work that did not engage their interest, despite being

planned at three different levels. In one lesson, this was due to the teacher's lack of confidence and the consequent rushing of the lesson which omitted an important teaching point. In the other lesson, the subject matter was unfamiliar to the teacher resulting in poor use of resources and little support for the pupils' learning.

The quality of learning was closely matched to the quality of teaching. In the most effective lessons the pupils made significant gains in their learning, because they understood exactly what they needed to do to improve. In the inadequate lessons the pupils lost interest, chatted inconsequentially, completed far too little work in the time available and achieved standards lower than those expected for their ages.

Since September, the senior managers have increased and improved the checking of lessons using an agreed set of criteria. Through this they are developing a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching which they have shared with the staff. Although the very good practice that exists in the leading teacher's class has been shared to good effect, there are still aspects of lesson planning and teaching that require further improvement.

There has been some improvement in the use of data about pupils' attainment and class teachers have current information about each pupil to hand. These improvements mean that teachers are becoming more aware of pupils' academic needs than was the case in the past and are beginning to recognise their responsibility in ensuring each pupil's progress year by year. Pupils could say where their targets were displayed but not all of those asked were able to explain what the targets meant or why they were appropriate.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets statutory requirements and is suitably enhanced by visits, visitors and residential experiences. An appropriate range of interesting clubs and activities, including sports, takes place during lunchtime and after school. A residential visit in Year 6 strengthens the pupils' knowledge and understanding in many areas of the curriculum, in addition to developing their social skills.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Improve the consistency of the teaching and learning with a particular emphasis upon meeting the full range of the pupils' attainment and needs – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

At the time of this monitoring visit, the deputy headteacher was leading the school. The local authority is working with the Diocese to put support into place should it be needed.

There has been satisfactory improvement in leadership and management. Senior managers, governors, and local authority advisers have worked together on preparing an appropriate improvement plan. The school now has a realistic view of its performance and the areas in which it needs to improve. There is a shared commitment to working together to achieve this. All know the areas for which they are responsible and have a sound understanding of the main measures of a school's performance. Some co-coordinators do not have an indication of the timescales in which their individual targets should be secured, or guidance about how to gauge the extent to which they have been successful in achieving the targets.

Subject co-coordinators are helping colleagues to gain confidence in making their own accurate assessments of pupils' standards, so that they no longer rely solely on the national tests in Year 2 and Year 6 to indicate how well pupils are achieving. They are satisfactorily leading their colleagues in developing records that can be shared with each other easily and effectively. The deputy head, also the assessment coordinator, compiles data thoroughly and shares this with staff but systems for storing data do not yet allow for speedy analysis. Senior leaders have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching. The work undertaken so far is beginning to result in improved quality of teaching and learning although inconsistencies still occur.

Governors have benefited from local authority training and are now better equipped to question and challenge the school on such matters as the impact of actions taken on pupils' achievements. The governors' action plan does not yet include sufficiently well defined indicators or evidence against which governors can judge how successfully the school is moving forward.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Ensure that the leadership and management adopt more rigorous approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work – satisfactory progress

External support

The local authority (LA) statement of action is satisfactory. It includes some good proposals for support, particularly in relation to improving teaching and learning, helping some managers to develop their roles as leaders and in quality assurance activities. The statement of action sets out clearly how the LA intends to support teachers and governors but is less clear about the specific support to be provided for the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The actions in the LA support plan are being implemented at a sensible pace so as not to overwhelm staff whilst maintaining an impetus for improvement. The LA plan does not outline how and when the LA intends to evaluate formally the extent of the school's improvement. An LA progress report was, however, written in March 2006, stating, in effect, that the school was responding appropriately to special measures and making reasonable progress.

Key Stage coordinators and coordinators for English and mathematics have benefited from LA consultants' and advisers' support in judging the quality of lessons and in making use of attainment information. Whilst their understanding is generally satisfactory, more can be done to improve skills further. The impact of LA support is visible in some aspects of lesson planning, particularly in the way some tasks are modified or presented to suit the differing needs of pupils. The governing body has appreciated LA support in reviewing its effectiveness and highlighting areas for improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Quality of LA's statement of action – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop further teachers' skills in using attainment data to promote and evaluate pupils' progress;
- Continue to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the Foundation Stage;
- Ensure that governors make use of explicitly stated and clear indicators to keep a check on the school's improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education & Community Services for Reading and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth.

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola
HM Inspector