



20 April 2006

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

Dear Mrs Fairhurst

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

Introduction

Following my visit with Jennifer Hall Additional Inspector to your school on 27 and 28 March 2006, 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 November 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, including seven lessons or part lessons and one assembly. We scrutinised documents, spoke informally with pupils and held discussions with the headteacher, some of the staff, a representative of the diocesan board, the local authority link inspector and the chairs of the governing bodies of this school and St Mary's Catholic Primary School.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2005 the governors have agreed to the acting headteacher becoming the substantive headteacher of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School.

Consequently, as from the 1 April 2006 St Mary's Catholic Primary School and St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School will federate under one Governing Body and headteacher.

Following the tragic loss of the school leader in December 2005, the Governing Body has appointed a temporary leader from St Mary's Catholic Primary School. The intention is that the acting school leader will support the headteacher in leading and managing St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School and will remain in post at least until the summer term 2007.

Achievement and standards

The good levels of progress made to improve standards in the Reception year and in reading and ICT throughout the school have been sustained. The school has also made good progress in raising standards in mathematics and pupils' achievement from Years 1 to 4 is now broadly satisfactory. There is now a satisfactory level of challenge in mathematics for higher attaining pupils, particularly in number work.

Standards in English and ICT are now broadly average by the end of Year 2 and there have been recent improvements in these subjects in Year 3. Although standards in science are improving, they are still too low throughout the school. Standards in ICT are also low in Key Stage 2 as is the standard of pupils' writing in Year 4.

The sharper focus on teaching phonics in Years 1 and 2 has helped to improve pupils' competence in reading, writing and spelling. However, this is not carried on in Years 3 and 4 even though many pupils still require support. This hampers their learning in other subject areas, including in working out word problems in mathematics.

The school is collecting increasing amounts of assessment information and this provides evidence that pupils make at least satisfactory progress. However, the data is presented in different formats and is insufficiently clear or helpful to teachers. This reduces the ability of staff to interrogate the data rigorously and use it effectively to promote higher standards of achievement.

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

- raise standards across the whole school and improve pupils' achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, science and ICT –

- good progress in mathematics, reading and ICT, and satisfactory progress in science and writing.
- raise standards in Reception and improve children's achievement by improving teaching, learning, the curriculum and assessment – good progress. This issue has been fully addressed.

Personal development and well-being

The quality of pupils' personal development and well-being is good. This is an improvement since the last monitoring visit. Pupils now enjoy their lessons more and are keen to join in practical tasks. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make a good contribution to discussions when new topics are introduced and when work is reviewed at the end of lessons. Pupils who are learning to speak English as an additional language have made friends quickly because other children have made them welcome.

Pupils understand the importance of physical exercise to help keep their bodies and brains healthy. They know how important it is to drink plenty of water. They make the right choices about eating healthy lunches and snacks. Pupils gain understanding at an appropriate level about drugs education. They know about the jobs that people do in the community through talks by visitors to school. Although aspects of personal and social education are taught in every year group, there is no consistent approach to ensure that pupils make progress from year to year.

The behaviour of pupils has improved since the last monitoring visit and is now good. Pupils respond well to the systems and procedures in place which promote good behaviour, for example the 'gold bands' and 'very important people' awards. As a result the number of referrals to the headteacher for inappropriate behaviour has significantly reduced.

Attendance is in line with the national average. However, it is considerably lower than in 2004 because more parents now take their children on holiday during school time, within the permitted ten day period. The amount of authorised absence has therefore increased as attendance has decreased. There is good support from the local authority to help improve attendance.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a strength of the school. Assemblies promote spiritual and moral awareness

well. There is increasing celebration of the cultures and faiths of pupils entering school from abroad.

Quality of provision

The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is suitably broad and meets statutory requirements. The breadth of the science curriculum in Years 1 and 2 is narrow.

The quality of teaching in Reception and Years 1 and 2 is generally good. Although minor weaknesses still exist within Years 3 and 4 teaching is now mainly satisfactory and sometimes good. Lower down the school where teaching is best pupils are clear about the learning objectives. Activities are well planned and take account of the range of abilities in a class. There is a good balance of whole class teaching, individual and group work. There are good opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in lessons, for example, during investigative work on 'mass' in mathematics.

In Years 3 and 4 the work in mathematics is now suitably challenging for the higher attaining pupils especially in number, but this level of challenge is less evident in other areas of the mathematics curriculum. There are also still missed opportunities in these year groups for pupils to discuss their work in pairs, before answering teachers' questions or engaging in written work. Furthermore, in a small minority of lessons, learning is not always sufficiently meaningful to all pupils and they are not encouraged to reflect sufficiently on what they are learning or their level of progress.

Pupils with learning difficulties, who are withdrawn for additional support for reading, make good progress. However, not all teachers' planning takes sufficient account of the targets in individual education plans. There is not a whole school approach to the way targets are used to support learning. These inconsistencies are unhelpful to pupils. Furthermore, the quality of marking is very variable. Where it is weak it does not help pupils to know what they need to do to improve and teachers do not make reference to targets or lesson objectives.

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

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

improving the management of pupils and satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 and 4.

Leadership and management

There have been good improvements in developing the role of the school leader. In a relatively short space of time he has established his credibility amongst pupils, staff and parents and has contributed significantly to strengthening the overall quality of leadership and management.

Subject leaders now have a better understanding of their role and responsibilities and they are beginning to provide a sense of direction and to make a positive contribution to school improvement. However, this is still in the early stages of development. They have not yet demonstrated their capacity to contribute to rigorous and accurate self-evaluation or bring about sufficient improvements in standards by impacting on the quality of teaching and learning. Many still lack the confidence to make judgements about standards and progress. Although subject leaders are developing a better understanding of the strengths and weakness in their areas of responsibility they are not analysing evidence rigorously enough. Furthermore, action plans do not make sufficient use of numerical targets and are not focussed sharply enough on raising standards.

The review of teachers' job descriptions has further clarified their respective roles and responsibilities. The headteacher now also has an appropriate job description. All teachers have professional development plans which are directly linked to the performance management cycle. There is now an improved focus of measuring the effectiveness of teaching by the impact on the rate of progress made by pupils.

The merging of the two governing bodies under the federation has already strengthened the quality of governance. The governing body has become more sharply focused on evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school.

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

- improve the leadership and management of the school, including systems for monitoring provision and identifying and addressing weaknesses – there has been good progress in improving the quality of leadership and management of the school and satisfactory progress in improving the systems for monitoring provision and identifying weaknesses.
- and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure statutory requirements for ICT and investigative science are met in Years 3 and 4 – satisfactory progress
- ensure the acting headteacher is given an appropriate job description - satisfactory progress

External support

The quality and impact of the support provided by the local authority have significantly improved since the last inspection. The school has received good support from the link inspector and from the Primary Strategy support team. This has enabled the school to prioritise areas of improvement and produce helpful action plans. As a result, there has been good progress on raising standards in mathematics and improving the distribution of leadership tasks amongst key staff.

The good quality of the external support provided by the diocesan adviser has also contributed to improving the quality of teaching. Although the focus has been on the teaching of religious education, teachers have found the emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills a helpful strategy which they have started to apply across the curriculum.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualifications:-

Newly qualified teachers must receive the opportunity of observing outstanding teaching.

There are no further additional priorities for improvement

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Senior Education Officer for Isle of Wight and the Diocese of Portsmouth.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
H M Inspector