



27 February 2006

Mrs Bernadette Balfe
The Acting Headteacher
St Gregory's Roman Catholic Primary
School
Woodfield Road
Ealing
London
W5 1SL

Dear Mrs Balfe

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST GREGORY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Nolan AI and Wendy Simmons AI to your school on 30 and 31 January 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in July 2005.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The headteacher has resigned, the former deputy headteacher has been appointed acting headteacher and a substantive appointment is planned for September 2006. A senior leadership team has been appointed from within the school, which remains fully staffed.

Achievement and standards

The children enter the nursery with skills and knowledge that exceed those usually found at their age, especially in personal development. As they move through the Foundation Stage, children make consistently good progress. They are confident, articulate, and keen to learn. The focus on basic skills, together with extension of their personal, creative and physical development, ensures that they are well prepared to enter Year 1. At this point, children's standards are well above average.

As at the time of the last inspection, standards in Years 1 and 2 are above average with pupils making satisfactory progress. However, the pace of challenge, especially for the most able pupils, is too slow. This is because work is not always planned and assessed to meet the specific needs of pupils of different abilities. Moreover, pupils' independent thinking and learning skills are underdeveloped. The school recognises this and has begun to make plans to resolve this problem.

Standards in Years 1 and 2 are better in reading and writing than in mathematics. Pupils do best in reading, where there is a clear and effective approach to gaining and practising skills. Moreover, pupils regularly talk about books and read to adults. The input of parents makes a positive contribution to standards. Pupils write for different purposes and often at length, but the way that teachers mark their work is not helping more of them to gain Level 3. In mathematics, the school is constructively encouraging pupils to think and record work, calculations and ideas more for themselves. However, there is inconsistency between classes in the quality of how teachers monitor pupils' progress and help them improve. Overall, assessment procedures, including marking, are inadequate to support better achievement.

The work seen in Years 3 to 6 shows that, while standards are above average, they could be higher still. While some classes are making good progress, pupils in other classes are held back by work that is not planned to meet the needs of different abilities. Standards in Year 6 are enhanced by the input of the outside tutors that many parents provide for their children. Within the school, the needs of high ability pupils are met least effectively in most classes. The progress of children with learning difficulties and disabilities varies, depending on the quality of support that they receive.

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

- raise the standards attained in Years 1 and 2 – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The school's positive ethos, backed up by strong parental support, continues to have a good effect on the pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. Pupils are extremely tolerant and usually work assiduously, even when classroom experiences are dull. Any restlessness and disengagement among some younger pupils often result from an imbalance between pupils' and adults' talk and a lack of stimulus in some lessons. The pupils behave well around the school and are courteous and helpful to each other and to adults.

The school provides a safe environment for the pupils. Relationships between adults and pupils are very positive so that pupils feel cared for and secure. The required procedures for child protection, noted at the last inspection as not fully addressed, have been implemented. Through the school council, pupils voice their views on many aspects of school life, including healthy eating.

The school has maintained the good attendance of pupils, noted at the last inspection. Attendance showed a further rise in the autumn term to over 96%. On the first day of the inspection, however, the proportion of the pupils present fell to 90%. Few pupils were late to school. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions.

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

- implement fully the required procedures for child protection – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is predominantly satisfactory. It has declined since the last inspection. There is a lower proportion of good teaching and some that is unsatisfactory. Not only is the quality of teaching inconsistent across and within year groups, but the quality of delivery within some classes varies too markedly between subjects.

In the good lessons, teaching was underpinned by well-structured activities, careful organisation and warm working relationships. Pupils were enthusiastic about their tasks and clearly enjoyed their learning. Teachers' expectations of work and behaviour were high and unambiguous, as in a Year 1 science lesson, physical education lessons for Years 3 and 4, and a literacy lesson for Year 4. These lessons proceeded at a quick pace and drew a good response

from pupils. In some good lessons, pupils had well-planned opportunities to strengthen independent study and thinking skills.

Most lessons benefited from the very good behaviour of the pupils and their willingness to work individually on routine tasks. Lessons that were satisfactory overall had a slower pace of learning, often because planning was not well founded on the rigorous assessment of pupils' learning. The most able pupils were too often unchallenged and, as a result, became bored and restless. Some lessons lacked a sense of urgency, and tasks were not interesting enough to engage the pupils fully. In a number of lessons, pupils were given little opportunity to communicate their understanding orally. In the unsatisfactory lessons, pupils made too little progress because of lengthy periods on single tasks, not well matched to their needs, or because of weak behaviour management. In one lesson, in-class marking was inaccurate.

The school has made modest progress in setting up whole-school assessment and tracking systems. However, practice is inconsistent between year groups, and between classes in the same year group. For example, one Year 6 class has individual targets in numeracy, but the other does not. There has been some moderation of assessment in English, mathematics and science with complementary training for staff on grading work accurately. Teachers' practice in using assessment in the classroom remains uncoordinated. There is some effective marking of work, particularly creative writing, in some classes, with pupils guided as how to improve their work. More generally, work is marked regularly and frequently, but not so as to help pupils make progress.

The curriculum is planned effectively to meet all statutory requirements including those for personal and social education. It has been further enriched since the last inspection with more opportunities for drama and art. Within the limits of whole-school planning, teachers organise their classes' timetables themselves. Staff are not always given enough guidance on how to manage potentially challenging timings for English, mathematics and science. One group, for example, has an afternoon of literacy and numeracy following a physically active morning, an arrangement that detracted from the learning of younger pupils unable to concentrate well at the end of the day.

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

- Create and implement effective and reliable assessment procedures – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher has resigned, the former deputy headteacher has been appointed acting headteacher, and a substantive appointment is planned for September 2006. A senior leadership team has been appointed from within the school, which remains fully staffed. Working relationships within the school's staff are good. The staff now works effectively as a team.

An independent audit of the school's finances has been carried out. Staff have been trained in financial procedures, and the governors and acting headteacher are working together effectively to manage the financial resources of the school. However, the concerns of parents about the former financial management problems of the school have not been allayed.

The school has begun to design monitoring and self-evaluation procedures, but these are at an early stage of implementation. Senior members of staff have been trained in the interpretation of data, including that available in the school's Ofsted PANDA. The acting headteacher has held some initial discussions with class teachers about curriculum coverage. But while the newly qualified teachers are receiving helpful monitoring of their teaching, monitoring of teaching and learning has not yet been introduced throughout the school, and the quality of teaching and learning has fallen since the last inspection.

Considerable variations in practice remain in aspects of the school including teaching, assessment and the management of behaviour.

The school's action plan is a thorough document that sets out what needs to be done and who will lead each development. However, the sequencing of the milestones for some key issues is not helping the school to make progress rapidly, for example in assessment.

The governance of the school has improved substantially. Information is shared effectively between the school and governing body, whose meetings include opportunities for discussion. Governors have received training, and further training is planned.

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

- take decisive and urgent action to resolve permanently the serious weaknesses in the leadership and management of the school and the long-term breakdown in the relationship between the headteacher and the staff – good progress

- instigate a full, detailed and independent audit of the school's finances and act upon its recommendations to improve the financial procedures – satisfactory progress
- design and introduce rigorous and reliable monitoring and self-evaluation procedures involving all senior staff and subject co-ordinators – satisfactory progress
- create and implement management and support systems and procedures, ensuring their consistent use throughout the school to eradicate the considerable variations in practice in many aspects of its work – inadequate progress

External support

The school has been supported effectively by the local authority and the diocese. The local authority's statement of action is good.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- eradicate unsatisfactory teaching, and raise the proportion of teaching that is good or better

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Schools Service for Ealing and the Diocese of Westminster.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mills

Additional Inspector