

20 June 2006

Miss M Curran
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Curran

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SACRED HEART CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 June 2006, 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 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

Observations were made of one assembly, playtime and lessons in each class. Discussions were held with the headteacher, two co-ordinators and a representative from the local authority (LA). A range of documentation was examined.

Context

There has been a change of teacher in the Nursery, but in other respects the welcome period of stable staffing has continued, allowing the school to consolidate the developments that are taking place.

Achievement and standards

The school's performance in the 2005 national tests was discussed in the letter following the first monitoring visit in March.

Action has continued on each of the subjects in need of improvement. The pupils have personal targets, which they know and are referred to in lessons. Specific attention has been paid to pupils' calculation skills, with awards for good knowledge of number facts, and staff have received training to exploit the school's new computer equipment.

Initial results in the 2006 national assessments for Year 2 pupils show considerable improvement on the previous year. The percentages of pupils reaching Level 2, the basic standard expected of seven-year-olds, are similar to previous national figures and regain the school's performance in 2004.

The results for Year 6 pupils will be released shortly, but the most recent teacher assessments suggest that the overall performance should match or improve on that in 2005, and the school should meet its targets.

This upward trend in standards was reflected in lessons, where pupils made at least satisfactory and often good progress.

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

- improve standards in all subjects, especially English, mathematics and information and communication technology – *satisfactory*

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' personal development is a strength of the school, and the positive attributes noted following the first monitoring visit in March remain.

The pupils were well behaved, interested and keen to do well. Their attendance has continued to be similar to the national average and there have been no exclusions.

The pupils' mature approach to school was particularly apparent in assembly, where they listened attentively to a visiting speaker and asked thoughtful questions about his work.

Quality of provision

Improvements to planning and monitoring have ensured that tasks in lessons are matched to the pupils' various levels of ability. This has been complemented by updating the information in the system for tracking the pupils' progress. Booster classes have been held for Year 6 pupils, and Year 5 pupils are receiving study support at Barnsley Football Club. Parents have attended workshops about national tests and literacy. In Reception there was a well-conducted session on phonics, where around ten parents watched the class after learning how they might help their children with early reading skills.

Curriculum guidance is being reviewed according to the action plans devised by co-ordinators. The programme of work is being considerably enriched by a wide range of additional activities. During the monitoring visit one class joined a sports event with other local schools, and the Year 6 pupils gained considerably from the expertise of a professional illustrator.

Various appropriate strategies have been implemented to raise the quality of teaching, and the results have been monitored to gauge improvement and pinpoint continuing weaknesses. The quality of teaching was good in four lessons and satisfactory in three; it was, again, consistently good at Key Stage 2. All the lessons benefited from careful planning, preparation and organisation. The learning objectives were clear and pupils were told what they must do to succeed. Most of the lessons were briskly paced, although there were occasions when the teacher was working harder than the pupils in this respect. Routines are well established and, together with succinct explanations, they ensure that pupils know what is expected.

The better lessons were marked out by challenging tasks, and the teacher's enthusiasm and detailed subject knowledge. The weaknesses in otherwise satisfactory lessons were: a lengthy introductory session which resulted in a loss of momentum; a failure to involve sufficient pupils when the class was being taught as a whole, and not checking on the degree of understanding across the class; and underuse of the classroom assistants.

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

- accelerate pupils' progression in learning throughout the school by improving the match of work to pupils' needs, especially the more able, and establishing a broad and balanced curriculum which meets requirements – *satisfactory*

- raise the quality of teaching to a consistently good standard through rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation - **satisfactory**

Leadership and management

The foundations for improvement had been laid by the initial monitoring visit in March. These have been built upon to establish the revised roles of individuals and teams, including the senior staff. The co-ordinators for subjects under development have taken a greater part in overseeing initiatives, and the senior team has adopted a more strategic approach.

There has been good involvement of a range of staff in the programme for monitoring and evaluating what is being achieved; for example several teachers have observed classroom practice and fed back the findings to their colleagues and given an overview to the senior team. There has rightly been a strong focus on raising standards. This is reflected in the agendas for meetings, in the well-judged training for staff, and in the work scrutinies. The system for tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics is particularly strong. It readily highlights those pupils who are reaching appropriate levels and those who are not. This approach is complemented by valuable analyses of test papers to determine where pupils find difficulties.

The governors have received reports of progress from the school and the LA, and one governor has provided a detailed review of science, but the precise role of the governors in checking the school's performance still requires firmer definition.

Overall, the headteacher is providing clear direction for the school's work and she is being well supported by the staff team. Morale is good and there is a shared desire to succeed.

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

- establish the roles and responsibilities of senior teachers and subject leaders **–good**

External support

The LA has continued to fulfil its commitments to the school. Support has been much appreciated and well targeted at the school's needs. A recent review of progress included appropriate further recommendations, looking towards the longer term.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – *satisfactory*

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – *good*

Priorities for further improvement

- The school's priorities remain those identified in the inspection in September 2005.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Executive Director of Education Services for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

J S Hardwick
H M Inspector