



04 January 2007

Miss Linda Heneghan
The 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 Maria Dawes, HMI and Patricia Walker, Additional Inspector to your school on 6 and 7 December 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 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, including 12 lessons or parts of lessons, scrutinised documents, met with the deputy headteacher, several members of staff, the chair of governors, three representatives from the local authority, a group of parents, and informally with pupils around the school and in lessons.

Context

The headteacher was absent on sick leave at the time of this visit and is expected to remain so for some months. The deputy head is currently in charge of the school. Four new teachers joined the school in September 2006. There are currently eleven classes.

Achievement and standards

Children in the reception class make satisfactory progress overall and good progress in developing the speaking and listening skills. They are able to explain their ideas fully in sentences because the reception class teacher encourages this and gives them plenty of opportunities to share their thoughts about the world around them. They listen well to adults and each other. Children's work and activity show that most of them can do what is expected for their ages.

Standards at the end of Year 2 in 2006 were broadly average. Results in writing improved due to an increased focus on this. Results in reading, however, continued to decline although the percentage of pupils achieving the highest level was significantly higher than in 2005. The national test results in 2006 for Year 6 pupils improved significantly. In all three core subjects the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected level for Year 6 was greater than nationally. However, the percentage attaining the highest level, although showing an improvement from the previous year, was still less than average. With the exception of reading in Year 2, the school met its targets representing satisfactory progress for most pupils.

In most lessons, pupils' standards are average and progress is at least satisfactory and often good. In some lessons, the standards of the most able pupils are high and an increased level of challenge and targeted teaching means that they are making good progress. Pupils generally speak confidently and clearly in lessons and around the school. The effective work of the literacy and numeracy coordinators in identifying whole school areas for improvement has increased pupils' rates of progress. The school has set itself challenging targets for this academic year. It is confident that these will be met given pupils' progress over the last year and the additional programmes that are being employed. There is however still some way to go.

The school has good systems to track pupils' progress. The progress of whole year groups as well as individual pupils is analysed frequently. That of specific sub-groups, for example pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, or those with English as additional language, is not yet checked as thoroughly.

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 – good progress

Personal development and well-being

The school's work in this area continues to be strong. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are confident, courteous and helpful. The adults in the school provide very good role models for this. Pupils enjoy school and are very specific about what they like most. They are enthusiastic about their lessons, because they enjoy the variety of learning experiences they are offered and enjoy challenge. This enjoyment is reflected in the slightly above average attendance levels.

Children in the reception class have settled quickly and follow the well established routines. They work with enthusiasm, a sense of security and are calm and sociable.

Pupils' spiritual development is good, in response to the many opportunities they are given to reflect on matters of deeper significance. This happens not only in assembly, but also in lessons, for example when young pupils were asked to reflect on the changing emotions of the characters in a story they were reading.

Quality of provision

Provision for children in the reception class has improved significantly and enables them to make a good start to school. The reception class is inviting, well resourced and organised, although the arrangement of the main book corner is cramped. Children have a good balance of interesting activities with a blend of teacher led sessions, working in small groups and the chance to choose from a wide range of well planned tasks. There are currently eleven children in the reception class and, with this number, reception staff can check informally that children cover all their areas of learning when choosing for themselves. A more formal system will be required when numbers grow from January. Teaching in the reception class is confident. The teacher has established effective classroom routines that children abide by, through her gentle yet firm and unobtrusive management of behaviour. Teaching

assistants work effectively and contribute well to assessing children's progress.

In Years 1 to 6, the proportion of good teaching has increased since the previous monitoring visit to bring about greater consistency. Some shortcomings remain and a few lessons or parts of lessons are inadequate. The school has clear expectations of how the quality of teaching needs to improve. The longer established teachers have benefited greatly from the measures which the school has put in place to bring this about. The teaching of more recently appointed teachers is generally not as strong as that of others.

Teachers have worked hard to respond to the areas of development identified during the previous visit. Most make good use of their assessments of pupils' attainment to plan work for all pupils across the ability range. In most classes, teachers and teaching assistants offer an effective balance of challenge and support to enable all pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. They make good use of questioning and discussion, with the whole class, in small groups or with 'response partners' to encourage pupils to share their views and listen to others. Teachers are now clearer about the learning which should take place, and they explain this to pupils. They are generally able to judge accurately for themselves how well their lessons have gone.

In the lessons with shortcomings, the work set does not meet all pupils' needs or build on their previous learning. In particular, lower ability pupils are set undemanding tasks which fail to engage them thus limiting their progress. Teachers plan lessons in good detail, but, in the less successful lessons, the tight planning dominates and does not allow for sufficient flexibility to deal with pupils' specific queries or uncertainties.

The curriculum is satisfactory and includes some good features in that pupils learn French and have a good range of extra-curricular activities. It supports pupils' personal development well and provides soundly for their academic achievement. Provision for literacy and numeracy has improved greatly since September 2005.

The school continues to offer good guidance and support to its pupils. Pupils feel well looked-after and speak very warmly of the help and support which teachers give them. Staff are attentive to pupils' needs. The school does not,

however, provide enough written guidance on the child protection procedures to be followed and newly appointed staff are not adequately informed about their responsibilities in this area. The school does not ensure that all documentation relating to child protection is kept securely under lock and key.

Pupils find the targets for improvement which they are set in English and mathematics helpful and some can talk about them knowledgably, appreciating the fact that they are able to refer to their target statements if they need to refresh their memory. This level of awareness is not, however, consistent across the school.

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

Improvements in leadership and management are apparent in many areas and at many levels. Action plans for improvement are appropriate and being enacted successfully. Governors have grown in their capacity to challenge the school and do so robustly with a firm focus on pupils' achievement. Senior and middle managers have also increased their effectiveness in evaluating both provision and outcomes. The quality of teaching and learning is checked frequently. Senior leaders are very clear about exactly where teaching and learning are of high quality and where further support is required. Some staff are given very specific action points for improvement but the frequency with which progress on these action points is checked is not quite high enough yet. The work of senior staff, together with support from external consultants, in raising the overall quality of teaching and learning, has borne fruit; staff recognise for themselves the way their practice has improved. Those teachers who have been in post in the previous academic year have reaped great benefit from the training initiatives. Some of those new to the school have yet to develop the skills others have acquired since September 2005. The way in which senior staff check lessons is still heavily focused on teaching. Whilst the focus on learning has increased, not enough emphasis is placed on articulating exactly what pupils' have learned in lessons and how they have learned it.

The confidence and competence of subject leaders and key stage coordinators has continued to grow and these teachers are contributing well to improving the school. They have developed well their skills in using data on pupils' standards and achievements and value the support and advice provided by the deputy headteacher in her capacity as the school's assessment coordinator, and also from the consultant headteacher.

Over the last year, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked together very closely. This has stood the school in very good stead because the deputy has been able to take charge effectively during the headteacher's absence on sick leave. This situation presents the school with some uncertainties about leadership and management. The governing body, with support and advice from the local authority and diocese, is seeking to secure the services of the headteacher of another Catholic school in Berkshire to lead the school as a temporary measure until July 2007.

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 - good progress

External support

The local authority continues to provide satisfactory support. Consultants from the local authority continue to work with teachers to develop their skills. A consultant headteacher from a local school has worked part-time since June 2006 with governors and senior managers on various aspects of management, especially on the use of data. The school has also valued her support greatly in many other ways, in providing a telephone help-line, for example. The school's link adviser from the local authority has kept the school's progress under review with accurate assessments of progress.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Work swiftly to ensure that the quality of lessons taught by the some of the more recently appointed teachers matches the generally good quality of the others.
- Develop further the school's systems for analysing data so that the performance of sub-groups of pupils is fully understood.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to child protection; produce written guidance; ensure that related documentation is kept securely.

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

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola
H M Inspector