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Mrs Pat Perkins
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Perkins

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST EDMUND'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 September 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 November 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 met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the coordinators for English and mathematics, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit seven teachers, including the acting headteacher and the substantive deputy headteacher, have left the school. A new headteacher has been appointed on a fixed term contract. The seconded deputy headteacher at the time of the last monitoring visit has been appointed as deputy headteacher on a fixed term contract. One member of

teaching staff is on a temporary contract. One teaching post is vacant and this class is currently being taught by the deputy headteacher.

Achievement and standards

Unvalidated test results for pupils in Year 6 in 2006, although lower than the national average for 2005, show a higher level of attainment than in 2005 in English, mathematics and science. However, the school acknowledges that there is still underachievement throughout the school. The progress seen in lessons and in pupils' work is inconsistent from Reception to Year 4. In these classes too many pupils are not achieving as much as they could. Progress made by pupils in Years 5 and 6 is better, with the majority of pupils making good progress. Approximately a quarter of the pupils in the school benefits from the Intensifying Support Programme, which was introduced last term. The school's assessment data indicates that these pupils are making good progress. The standard of handwriting and the presentation of pupils' work are now satisfactory.

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

- raise standards in Years 1 to 6 and remedy the weaknesses in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of pupils continue to be satisfactory. Pupils are friendly and cheerful, and many show a lively attitude to their daily school life. They are keen to play a part in helping the school to improve, although they are a little disappointed that 'we have not had any school council meetings for a while'. Some pupils still find it difficult to concentrate, especially during lengthy verbal inputs from teachers. In spite of a small amount of over exuberance, pupils continue to behave well around the school.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains inadequate. This is because there has been considerable instability in the teaching staff, with consequent inconsistency in how teachers try to improve standards, learning and achievement. A number of teachers have left, sometimes after only a short time, and some classes have had several different teachers during the school year. These factors have made improvement in teaching and learning difficult to achieve consistently across the school. Opportunities to share aspects of good practice have been very limited. The school is in the early stages of preparing a teaching and learning policy in order to establish consistent expectations of teaching.

Pupils of all abilities make the best progress in Years 5 and 6 because teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The teaching, which is often good, is characterised by challenge for all abilities, good open ended questioning and pupils being clearly aware of their learning objectives. However, too much teaching in other year groups is unsatisfactory. Many lessons have overlong introductions, when pupils lose concentration and interest. Tasks frequently consist of laborious exercises of copying writing, rather than providing pupils with opportunities to think and be creative. Pupils frequently do not have a clear idea of what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson.

The curriculum is unimaginative, and many pupils have insufficient opportunities to learn according to their needs, for example through practical experiences. Where pupils have received specific support, for example those of low average ability, learning and achievement have improved. Planning now takes more account of the needs of groups of different abilities, but the needs of some individuals are not always recognised in the planning. Opportunities for independent learning remain limited.

There has been some improvement in assessment. The school has introduced a system to assess pupils on a regular basis and teachers have begun to use and understand the data produced as a tool for guiding learning. Teachers' marking has also improved. Most are making helpful developmental comments to improve pupils' work in English as well as celebrating good pieces of work. However, some pupils find it difficult to read or understand the comments. Nevertheless, pupils say that they find their targets helpful and that teachers usually explain how they are doing.

The new headteacher is appropriately trained in child protection procedures and has taken over from the previous holder of the responsibility. Despite the many changes in staff, the school has ensured that the most recent requirements for the protection and safety of pupils in school are being met. Pupils from all year groups indicated full confidence that they are safe and secure in school.

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

- improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The lack of consistent senior leadership of the school since being placed in special measures has impeded the rate of progress that the school is making. The recently appointed headteacher has established clear expectations for teaching and learning. However, many initiatives are so recent that they have not yet had a noticeable effect on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards.

A systematic approach to monitoring the work of the school has been put in place and the headteacher has sensibly involved the senior staff. Good use has been made of external advice to support the senior team. For example, the LA advisor has provided professional support for the headteacher during lesson observations. Feedback notes indicate that these are carried out rigorously and teachers are given clear and appropriate targets for improvement.

The development of senior leaders is rightly a high priority for the school. The coordinators for English and mathematics are already working effectively with the headteacher and her deputy. They have used information collected from monitoring activities to inform improvement work. For example, pupils' completed national test papers have been analysed to highlight areas of weakness.

Sensible decisions have been made to move teachers and learning assistants to different year groups. Appropriate support has been provided for teachers who need it. However, the high turnover of teaching staff has meant that much of this work is lost as teachers leave and new ones arrive. Specialist teachers from other schools are providing good professional support to the teaching staff.

The school has collected attainment data for all of its pupils from Years 1 to 6 and has put in place appropriate arrangements to add to this data on a termly basis. At this time, there is insufficient data for the school to be able to demonstrate the progress that individual pupils are making.

The governing body has recruited a number of new governors and managed to include a good range of expertise. The governors are provided with clear and frank information about the school by the headteacher. As a result, the governing body is now effective in supporting the school and holding it to account.

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

- take a more rigorous approach to addressing areas of weakness – satisfactory.

External support

The diocese and the LA have continued their support in ensuring that the school has a headteacher and deputy headteacher. The LA has also provided financial assistance to enable the school to improve its reading resources. The introduction of the Intensifying Support Programme into the school by the LA has helped to improve the progress made by a significant proportion of pupils. A major part of LA support has been the advice given to senior leaders. This has helped them to monitor the work of the school and to plan sensible actions for improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning by making best use of the good practice that already exists in the school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Learning and Culture for Birmingham and the Director of Schools for the Diocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby
H M Inspector