



31 October 2006

Mr J Graham
Headteacher
St James CE VA Primary School
Guildford Road
Colchester
Essex
CO1 2RA

Dear Mr Graham

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES
CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Introduction

Following my visit with Ann Taylor and John Messer, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 04 - 05 October 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 December 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, children, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The organisation of the school has changed. A new headteacher has been in post since September 2006. The former deputy headteacher has resigned and governors plan to make a new appointment for January 2007. A coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO), appointed for two terms, continues to work part time in the school. The LA has withdrawn the support of the advisory headteacher.

Over the coming year, the school will be supported by the LA's consultants and advanced skills teachers. It is also included in the Primary Leadership Programme.

Achievement and standards

Standards have begun to improve. In September 2006, standards on entry to the school were well below average, particularly in communication, language and literacy. A rigorous system of teaching phonics, known as ERR, is now taught thoroughly in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, and this is making a major contribution to improvements in literacy. The results of national assessments for children in Year 2 in 2006 were better than in 2005. Although still below the national average, results in reading improved. Results also improved in writing but remain significantly below the national average. The proportion of children who exceeded the national target of Level 2 and attained the higher Level 3 standard in reading and writing was well below national averages. This indicates that the most capable children are still not achieving well enough in literacy. Results improved in mathematics and matched the national average.

Progress in Years 3 to 6 is uneven. Children do not make as much progress as they should in Years 3, 4 and 5; they make better progress in Year 6. The school's overall performance in national tests for children in Year 6 in 2006 was not as good as in 2005. Results in English improved slightly and were broadly average. Results in mathematics declined and were below the national average. The proportion of children who exceeded the national target of Level 4 and attained the higher Level 5 standard was above average in English but below average in mathematics and science. This indicates that the more capable children are achieving well in English but not achieving as well as they should be in mathematics and science.

The school has now developed good systems to measure the amount of progress that children make in each class, in each year, in English and mathematics. This helps subject leaders to know exactly where children are making suitable progress and where they are underachieving. The next major task is to iron out inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in order to promote more consistent progress throughout the school.

Judgement

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

- Raise standards achieved in English, mathematics and science, especially at Key Stage 1 and amongst the most capable children throughout the school – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The school is an orderly community and children's attitudes and behaviour continue to improve. A new behaviour policy has been introduced and all staff are trying to manage behaviour in a consistent way. Assemblies are used well to encourage children to take a pride in their school and to celebrate community achievements. The achievements of particular children in each class who have produced especially good pieces of work are celebrated each week. Their names and their work are carefully displayed on the 'Star Awards' board in the hall. This is helping children to develop respect for the achievements of others and is promoting a positive learning ethos.

The LA's behaviour support team has also helped the school to devise a new system of rewards and sanctions that is designed to improve attitudes to learning. Older children are given responsibilities, such as helping to supervise the youngest children during playtimes; this helps to build their self-esteem.

In some lessons, teachers still have to spend time managing behaviour and overcoming restlessness before they can embark on the teaching they have planned. Attitudes to learning are not always as positive as they might be, particularly in lessons where the teaching is only satisfactory or inadequate. There is still a small number of children who present very challenging behaviour but this usually is controlled well so that the learning of others is not interrupted.

Judgement

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

- Improve attitudes and behaviour of a few children in some of the junior classes – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains satisfactory. Although the proportion of good lessons observed was higher than at the time of the last visit, a similar amount of inadequate teaching was seen. No teaching observed was outstanding. Teaching for the very youngest and oldest children is generally stronger than for the rest of the school. This matches the standards the children are attaining and the progress they are making. Much more good or better teaching is needed if the school is to tackle underachievement, particularly in writing and mathematics.

Since the arrival of the new headteacher, there have been many positive changes introduced to try and improve the quality of lessons. A new teaching and learning policy was introduced at the start of term. This lays out clear and appropriate 'non negotiable' expectations for good teaching and learning. Many of these were present in the good lessons observed. For example, giving clear indications of what children were to learn, and concluding lessons with children assessing the success of their learning, using the new green, amber and red evaluation code.

Learning targets in English and mathematics are now displayed prominently in classrooms, although children are generally less confident in speaking about their mathematics targets than those set for English. It is rare to see teachers using these targets, to remind children what they are aiming for when completing their work. Marking has improved. The new marking policy is being closely adhered to and a rigorous system is in place to monitor its use. Inconsistencies remain, however, in the quality of presentation in children's work.

Other positive changes introduced since the start of the year include a more consistent approach to lesson planning, and more opportunities for children to use information and communication technology (ICT). A set of laptop computers has been purchased to enable children to work on personalised learning programmes to consolidate their skills in reading and mathematics. Curriculum enrichment "shine" afternoons engage children in a range of creative and sporting activities. Teaching assistants continue to provide good support for groups of children during lessons and classrooms are better organised and displayed.

Provision in the Foundation Stage has improved. Teachers have a better understanding of the children's attainment on entry and the rates of progress they can be expected to make. The curriculum experienced by Reception children is better matched to their needs. There is good staff teamwork and especially good modelling by teaching assistants of the standard of behaviour and attitudes expected. This is particularly important given some children enter the school with weak personal and social skills. Improvements are required in assessing children's achievements as they happen in lessons.

Judgement

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

- Improve the use of assessment and marking so that teachers plan their lessons more effectively to take account of what children already know – satisfactory progress.

- Develop the curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, to help them learn more effectively through structured play activities - good progress.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has begun to refocus the work of the school. Since his arrival, he has set about establishing the right conditions for improvement. The school community now has a greater understanding of where the school is heading and is learning how it will get there. There is improved teamwork amongst staff with raised expectations and a stronger commitment to achieving higher standards. The school self evaluation (SEF) report has been updated and now reflects more accurately the quality of education provided. The school is beginning to build its capacity to improve.

The post-Ofsted action plan has been rewritten and now indicates much more clearly what actions will be taken to bring about improvement, and how impact will be judged and evaluated. In the short period of time since the beginning of term many positive changes have been introduced. A more systematic approach to collecting and analysing attainment data has begun, with a greater focus on tracking the progress of children with learning difficulties (LDD) and those whose first language is not English (EAL). A policy for teaching and learning and for supporting children with learning and behavioural difficulties has been adopted. These have begun to help staff improve consistency in their teaching. Improvements made to the learning environment have resulted in better use of teaching spaces, more focused displays and reorganised resources. The headteacher recognises that the changes are not yet embedded. Consequently, they have yet to impact fully on improving the quality of provision or on tackling underachievement.

The leadership and management of key staff still require improvement. Too much rests on the actions taken by the headteacher. However, some improvements have been secured since the last visit. A leadership team now meets regularly to discuss progress with school improvement priorities. Regular monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher have begun with a fortnightly work and planning scrutiny in English and mathematics. This will be continued by the subject leaders for English and mathematics to increase their improving knowledge of the standards in their subjects and where there is underachievement. Monitoring in science and ICT will also be introduced later in the term. Governors expect to appoint a new deputy headteacher for January 2007.

The SENCO, appointed for two terms, has successfully established a system of recording and analysing assessments to identify children who are underachieving. She has also set up inclusion files in each class which contain children's individual education plans and monitoring records of their progress. This has helped teachers to plan more effectively for the learning needs of all children in their classes. The school recognises that some of the targets in the current plans need to be more sharply defined. The SENCO is working

through an improvement plan which includes a number of key actions to improve the quality of support provided for children who have learning difficulties or who have fallen behind.

The governing body is beginning to discharge its duties in a more coherent and systematic way. The school now has a full complement of governors. Additional meetings and training have been organised to improve the skills of governorship. Governors have approved a protocol for monitoring visits and the first of these have been completed. Reports are written following the visits and some identify issues for further attention and questions for the school. Governors are becoming better informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses. The influence of the headteacher on improving governorship has been crucial. He has created 'road maps' for governor committee actions and sensibly realigned responsibilities to match the inspection key issues.

Overall, a very good start has been made by the new headteacher in laying the foundations for further improvement. Nevertheless, he and governors recognise the importance of accelerating the pace of these developments. Establishing further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and tackling underachievement remain two key priorities.

Judgement on progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2005:

- Stabilise leadership and management of the school by appointing a permanent headteacher and deputy headteacher, and strengthen the senior management and governance of the school – satisfactory *progress*.

External support

The headteacher and governors continue to value the support they receive from the local authority (LA). The headteacher believes the support provided by the LA's consultants has been good and has helped to bring about improvements. Regular monitoring of progress is completed by the school development adviser and points for action are recorded after each visit. Guidance and training from an advisory governor has helped the governing body to improve its effectiveness. The LA behaviour support team will be leading training for all staff and governors as part of a programme of support requested by the new headteacher. The authority believes the target for the school to 'no longer require special measures' by the autumn term 2007 is still achievable.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities highlighted during the first monitoring visit remain the same.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocesan authority and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Robert McKeown
H M Inspector