



7 December 2006

Mr P Hamilton
Associate Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School
Hadfield Street
Higher Broughton
Salford
M7 4XG

Dear Mr Hamilton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Tony Painter, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 December 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 became subject to special measures in July 2006.

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 12 part lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the associate headteacher, the headteacher designate, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), groups of pupils, and nominated staff.

Context

Since the school was placed in special measures in July 2006 there have been a number of significant changes to the management structure. The headteacher at the time of the inspection is no longer in post. An associate headteacher has, since September 2006, been seconded to lead the school for one term. The school has appointed a new substantive headteacher who is due to take up post in January 2007. Two teachers have resigned. Both of the posts have been filled; the deputy headteacher is also undertaking the

role of classroom teacher and a fixed-term appointment has been made to fill the second post.

The LA has been closely involved with the school. It has not withdrawn delegation of funding and the governing body remains constituted.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory given the pupils' low starting points on entry to the school. By the end of Key Stage 1 standards are significantly below national averages. The results of the 2006 national tests for Year 6 pupils show that standards remain low, particularly for boys. Pupils underachieved because of weak teaching in the past and the school did not meet its targets. This picture of poor performance reflects the inadequacies identified in the last inspection.

Progress since the school has been in special measures is more positive. A start has been made on identifying pupils' starting points and targets. Class targets for English and mathematics have been identified for all pupils in Years 3 to 6. Challenging performance targets have been set. However, systems to track the progress of all pupils remain underdeveloped throughout the school.

Pupils' progress in the lessons observed during the visit was positive and many know what is expected of them. Pupils are responding well to efforts to develop their social skills.

Effective practice to track the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is established. These pupils are set clear and specific learning targets that are well tailored to tackle their weaknesses in English and mathematics. Such targets help to take their learning on in small steps. Their progress is regularly reviewed and some make satisfactory progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2006:

- Raise standards and achievement throughout the school especially for pupils in Key Stage 2 – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The school has successfully maintained the strengths in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development identified in the inspection in July 2006. Better teaching is leading to improved behaviour in lessons and most pupils have good attitudes to work. Throughout the school, relationships are strong and pupils are friendly and outgoing and they learn good manners. They say that they enjoy their lessons, are happy in school and know that staff will give them help if needed. Attendance fell last year and the school

did not reach its targets. However, a number of new strategies have now been introduced, although variations between classes and from week to week remain. The attendance for the week prior to the inspection was around the national average. However, the school has not yet introduced consistent systems to ensure that all families are contacted on the first day of any child's absence.

Quality of provision

The school has taken effective measures to raise the quality of teaching and learning, in particular over eliminating inadequate teaching. No inadequate lessons were observed during the inspection and the overall quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory. Regular monitoring of teachers' planning has established a more consistent approach through the school. Plans are more securely focused at the levels appropriate to the ages of pupils in the class and the degree of challenge is improving. Most lessons in English and mathematics, for example, include work that has been planned for pupils in different ability groups. Many lessons make effective use of well briefed teaching assistants to support the learning of groups and individual pupils. This is particularly the case when they work with pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Throughout the school, teachers make effective use of their strong relationships with pupils to establish good organisation and routines. Lessons start briskly because teachers have effectively organised the well chosen resources to aid learning. Lessons are purposeful and pupils show enthusiasm for learning and work hard. Pupils say that the lessons are improving and that they enjoy them.

Teachers are better at identifying what pupils need to learn in their lessons and how this will be evaluated. In some lessons, teachers ensure that the pupils are clear about their learning and how they can improve it. However, this approach is not consistent through the school and some opportunities to raise the pace of learning are still missed. Some marking clearly identifies what pupils need to do next but this is not always the case. Systems for setting targets for individuals or groups of pupils are similarly inconsistently used in lessons. In the best lessons, teachers remind pupils of what they need to do and assessments relate directly to these targets. Targets are used to remind pupils of important aspects of their learning that they need to consider in their work. This process raises both the pace of learning and the quality of the final work.

The school does not yet have a secure assessment system that can accurately track how well pupils are doing through the school. This leads to inconsistencies in the levels of challenge of the tasks planned for pupils of different abilities. The low-level tasks identified in the last report have largely been eliminated but not yet consistently replaced with challenging tasks that will ensure that all pupils make good progress through the school. As a result,

teachers cannot ensure that the progress made in any lesson or lessons can be maintained over time.

The curriculum and care, guidance and support for pupils continue to be satisfactory and of great importance to the school. Pupils are safe and well cared for.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise expectations of what pupils can achieve – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The associate headteacher has provided firm and clear leadership since the last inspection. The school has acted swiftly to provide consistency in the leadership and management. The establishment of a monitoring committee is a positive step and all key parties are appropriately represented.

At the last inspection the school lacked many of the most basic structures and systems. Assessment, target setting and tracking of pupils' progress were minimal and there was no monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Moves to tackle some of these shortcomings are beginning to be established. The quality of teachers' planning is regularly scrutinised. Frequent checks are made on teaching and to monitor pupils' writing. These systems are beginning to support a more robust approach to checking and assuring the quality of the school's work. This is mostly undertaken by the associate headteacher and the school improvement officer, for example in monitoring the impact of recent training and coaching. Staff now expect training to be implemented and followed through with monitoring. Monitoring records show that most teachers are responding to feedback on their performance and are improving their practice. Good progress has been made in tackling the weakest teaching, though inconsistencies remain.

An audit of the learning environment has been conducted and the school has acted quickly to update learning resources and to tackle inadequacies in the accommodation.

School plans to deal with the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection are clear and focused on priorities. Monitoring is sharply identifying weaknesses, and high expectations are evident in regular reports to the monitoring committee and in the associate headteacher's reports to governors. However, the stronger focus on school self-evaluation has yet to permeate through to teachers' evaluation of learning, or to identify the impact the new measures are having on pupils' achievement and progress.

The governing body is supportive of the school, is informed about recent developments and is working well with the associate headteacher.

Arrangements for the conduct of business are in place and meetings are held more regularly than previously. A positive sign is the recent progress in filling vacancies for parent governors and the high level of interest in these posts shown by the community.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2006:

- Improve monitoring and evaluation and the use of assessment data to accelerate pupils' progress – satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA's statement of action meets requirements. It is clear and well matched to the needs of the school. Since the last inspection, the LA has made a considerable commitment to the school in terms of officer and consultant time. This support is well focused and has shown positive results. Guidance and support are effective and have helped to resolve staffing issues very quickly. This is rightly valued by governors.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Establish systems to track the progress and achievement of pupils.
- Develop the use of assessment to support and extend current improvements in teaching.

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

Yours sincerely



Gina White
H M Inspector