



16 March 2007

Mr David Deane
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Primary School
Hadfield Street
Higher Broughton
Salford
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Dear Mr Deane

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 March with Jim Alexander, Additional Inspector, 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 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 the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), groups of pupils and nominated staff.

Context

There has been only a comparatively short time between this visit and the previous inspection visit. Within that time the new headteacher and the Year 2 class teacher took up their posts, in January. A number of developments have begun recently but they are at very early stages. The school has been notified that it is to receive additional funding and LA support as part of a national programme for schools in challenging circumstances. Decisions have already been taken on how the funding is to be used over the next two terms

to enrich the planned support in Key Stage 2 and to provide additional support to leadership and management.

Achievement and standards

Most pupils made satisfactory progress in the lessons observed: some made good progress in response to closely defined learning objectives in literacy and numeracy. Standards overall remain low. The school's current assessment of pupils' high attainment on entry does not accurately reflect what inspectors found and is inconsistent with the trend in previous years. This warrants further investigation as the need to establish an accurate baseline will be an important factor in measuring pupils' progress over time.

The school has moved quickly to ensure that all pupils have individual attainment targets in mathematics and English, in addition to the class targets they had at the last monitoring visit. Systems to track pupils' progress have been developed and implemented consistently across the school in the last two months. As a result teachers are better able to identify pupils who have not grasped key learning concepts and to take action to remedy this in subsequent lessons. The school is more alert to where pupils have gaps in their learning and is taking steps to close them. Teachers' and pupils' expectations are rising.

A range of specific support to raise standards in literacy and numeracy is under way. Some is at an early stage and the school has yet to determine measures to identify the progress pupils are making in the short term. School data shows that pupils receiving additional help are making gains in their learning. Almost all of the Year 6 pupils involved have responded positively to booster sessions: most have improved their reading comprehension and all have improved their scores in mental arithmetic tests. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly in weak language speaking and listening skills, have responded well to the first 10 week intervention programme. The school is sensibly building upon this and using it more widely throughout the school.

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

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning continue to be good. Pupils are mostly enthusiastic and keen to participate in lessons. They are responding positively to newly introduced strategies that help them to identify the strengths and weaker features in their writing. Pupils say this is helping them to see and know exactly what they need to do to improve. More pupils are

making efforts to attend regularly and most arrive on time. The school has expanded strategies to promote high attendance. Attendance has improved since the last visit: it currently stands at 95% since September 2006. Pupils say the school is friendly and they feel safe. They know who to talk to if they experience bullying but some are unclear or unwilling to report the rare occasions when they experience racist comments.

Quality of provision

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school has continued to take effective measures to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning in lessons were at least satisfactory and more good lessons were seen than previously. These developments need to be fully embedded across the school. There were common positive features in many lessons, including good behaviour and attitudes shown by all the pupils. There is a developing culture of, 'it's better to have a go and fail than not to try'. Work is also better matched to pupils' needs and interests and this helps to fuel their motivation. Teachers are growing in confidence in using computer resources to support learning.

In the better lessons there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere. These lessons are well planned, with a range of tasks and activities to build pupils' knowledge and skills. The length of time given to particular tasks also ensures pupils remain actively engaged. Teachers quickly move the activity on developing it further, adding more challenge when pupils' interest starts to wane. This ensures a brisk pace to the learning. Pupils respond well to the appropriate level of challenge and high expectations for their behaviour, consequently they progress well.

Effective links are being developed in some lessons between subjects so pupils can see how their work in mathematics, for example, can support their learning in geography. The work on display in classrooms has improved. In the best examples the displays not only celebrate pupils' work, but also are informative and interactive. In a Year 4 class, for example, pupils made good use of the 'wow words' display to help improve the quality of their writing.

Teachers' planning is more effective because of the new headteacher's regular monitoring. Teachers explain that this is, 'keeping us on our toes, and sharpening our practice'. Consequently, they are beginning to analyse what is required in their lessons to raise standards. Work planned for the pupils is beginning to be pitched more accurately to meet their needs. Teachers are becoming more confident in their use of assessment procedures.

The quality of marking has also improved. A colour-code system, whereby teachers highlight strengths and the features that need improving in pupils' work, has been introduced since the last monitoring visit. Teachers are providing clearer guidance so pupils know what is required to improve the

quality of their work. In some lessons pupils were able to explain the system clearly and said, 'yes it helps, it's new and it really makes me think about what I could do to my work'. This level of confidence is not yet secure in every class. However, monitoring is helping to embed the new system across the school.

There are aspects of teaching and learning that are less successful. The pace of learning is faster in some lessons than in others and consequently some pupils do not make the progress they might. Some teachers do not provide work that is challenging enough for some of the more able pupils: some tasks are allowed to continue for too long. Consequently, some pupils become restless. On these occasions teachers manage the behaviour rather than change the task to fully engage the pupils.

The curriculum and care, guidance and support continue to be satisfactory. The school takes appropriate measures to meet current requirements for the safeguarding of pupils. A programme of formal induction, assessment and learning for newly arrived pupils, many of whom are at early stages of learning English, has been implemented just prior to this visit. The impact of this work is at too early a stage to evaluate.

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 school's leadership and management continue to improve. The new headteacher has brought a number of high-level teaching and management skills to the school. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are now more extensively implemented by the headteacher. His analysis of lessons, teachers' planning and scrutiny of pupils' books are rigorous. This results in very detailed feedback and firm guidance to staff and clearly communicates the headteacher's high expectations. Staff are responding positively to this accountability, although the very recent introduction of such sharper monitoring and evaluation practice has yet to become sufficiently embedded to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. Teachers now monitor pupils' learning more closely and assess and record how well each pupil knows and understands the weekly learning objectives. The headteacher's latest evaluation demonstrates that most pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. This also indicates that the intensive support at Key Stage 2 is beginning to improve pupils' progress. Monitoring and evaluation are leading to modifications in approach. For example, following a recent book scrutiny a target of three writing sessions per week has been introduced to combat the

wide variations in provision. The role of coordinators in monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning is underdeveloped.

A number of key initiatives and actions identified in the school's improvement plan have been implemented in a relatively short period. As a result of the training and support, teachers and learning support staff are more confident with literacy. They know how to teach guided reading, word-level work and phonics and they are applying what they have learnt.

Since the last visit the school has responded swiftly to introduce systems to track pupils' progress. Assessment points and measures to check pupils' progress annually have been clearly identified, but measures to check the progress they make over shorter periods are less developed.

Regular reports continue to keep the monitoring committee and governors well informed about the pace and impact of the developments taking place. Currently reports focus more strongly on reporting the changes taking place to improve the quality of teaching and learning because of the early stage of many of the developments and the lack of measures noted above.

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 has continued to provide a high level of effective support and advice to teachers on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Recent work has begun to model good practice and support teacher assessment, this aligns well with the school's needs and the LA's action plan. As a result, teachers' knowledge of how to implement the national strategies is improving. However, evaluations are at an early stage in identifying the difference this is making to pupils' progress and achievement in the short term. Support is well coordinated so as not to overburden the school.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop further the school's monitoring and evaluation to check the pupils' progress in the short term.
- Develop the coordinators' role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning in the areas for which they are responsible.

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