



06 February 2007

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 to your school on 17 and 18 January 2007, 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 December 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, staff, the vice chair and two other governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

A new deputy headteacher has been in post since January 2007. The part time special educational needs coordinator, appointed temporarily for two terms, is now a permanent member of staff. One teacher and one member of staff who worked in the school office have left. A reorganisation of administrative responsibilities is underway. As the school roll is falling, the teaching staff complement will be reduced by two for September 2007. The school continues to be supported by local authority (LA) consultants and advanced skills teachers within the Primary Leadership Programme. More children whose first language is not English have joined the school.

Achievement and standards

Standards continue to improve slowly but progress remains uneven across the school. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain and this is affecting the progress pupils make, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5.

Progress in the Foundation Stage is at least satisfactory. Assessments completed by teachers at the end of the autumn term indicate that children's attainment is improving in all areas of learning. An analysis of the assessments revealed that less progress was being made in social and emotional development and knowledge and understanding of the world. Teachers have taken action to remedy this by adjusting their planning and encouraging parents to attend a social skills group. Most children are currently on track to reach the expected level for their age by the end of the year.

The school recognises that standards and achievement are still not good enough. The current Year 6 is working below the expected level. However, a detailed analysis of pupils' attainment and progress completed by the English and mathematics subject leaders indicated that pupils in Year 6 made good progress in the autumn term, particularly in reading and writing. In spite of this, they will do extremely well to meet the challenging targets set for the end of the year. The subject leaders' analysis revealed that much less progress was made by pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5. Targets set for pupils in Year 2 indicate that attainment by the end of the year should be close to the national levels in reading, but below in mathematics and writing. More effective teaching in Years 1 and 2 is expected to lead to pupils making better progress this year.

The school is beginning to record pupils' progress in other subjects. From the assessments completed so far, pupils appear to be making satisfactory progress in ICT and science and most are reaching the levels expected for their respective year groups. However, some pupils in Year 6 need to make significant progress in science if they are to reach the expected level by the end of the year. More assessments are required of pupils' investigational skills in science and these are to be introduced soon.

Targeted support in reading is provided for pupils who have fallen a long way behind and this is proving successful. A more systematic approach to using intervention programmes for children who have slipped back has yet to be introduced. Helping pupils to fill gaps in their learning is managed well in Year 6 but not as systematically elsewhere in the school. Additional teaching sessions for more able pupils are planned for and about to begin. Speedy maths sessions, homework and regular opportunities to use ICT are helping to raise standards and accelerate progress. The school has an increasing number of pupils who arrive with little spoken English. It is important that these pupils receive appropriate support to enable them to make as much progress as possible during their time in 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 behaviour of the overwhelming majority of pupils is good. Pupils move to and from assemblies in an orderly way. They listen well and participate in community singing and in collective worship. Expectations are high for pupils' involvement and good behaviour in assemblies. These occasions provide good opportunities for spiritual development and to celebrate pupils' achievements. Pupils appreciated having the chance to discuss behaviour and the enjoyment of school with the LA behaviour support team. The new positive recognition system and golden time rewards are very popular and pupils are eager to accumulate commendations.

There are still a small number of pupils who have challenging behaviour. They are given good support by learning support assistants and the inspector did not witness any unsatisfactory behaviour during the visit. The number of fixed term exclusions is lower now than at the time of the inspection and the school's aim is to eliminate the need to exclude pupils. Staff received training on responding to bullying and successfully managing pupils' behaviour. Two learning support assistants have responsibility for supporting pupils who feel they are unhappy in school and for managing solution groups. These are organised very well and outcomes from the support groups are monitored regularly.

Attitudes to learning continue to improve; another benefit of the reward system. Behaviour in lessons is usually good but some pupils are still inattentive and restless in lessons in which the teaching is weak. Raising pupils' expectations of their capabilities and what they can achieve continues to be a priority. Public displays of work completed in 'Shine' lessons and the star awards system are helping to achieve this. Pupils' views on how the playground environment can be improved have been collected. More play equipment and trained play leaders are proposed as part of the school's involvement in a local sports partnership. Older pupils continue to take responsibility for helping the school to run smoothly. The school has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving pupils' personal development and well-being through listening and responding to their views.

Attendance in the autumn term was satisfactory and just above national levels. The school aims to improve this and reward pupils who achieve 100% attendance. A new attendance policy is to be approved by governors and sent to parents for consultation. Close monitoring of the attendance of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties is underway.

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 – good progress

Quality of provision

Improving teaching and learning continues to provide the school with its biggest challenge. The headteacher believes the proportions of good, satisfactory and inadequate teaching remain similar to that at the time of the last monitoring visit. Until teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons and a sizable proportion is good, the drive to raise standards and achievement quickly in all classes is unlikely to be successful. Consistently good teaching continues to be found in the classes for the oldest and youngest pupils. The weakest teaching is in Years 3, 4 and 5. A great deal of guidance and support has been provided to improve teaching but this has had a limited impact in some classes. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher has strengthened teaching in Years 1 and 2.

Setting clear objectives for what pupils will learn in lessons is now in evidence in all classes. Teachers are using ICT more regularly to support their teaching and pupils' learning but the interactive whiteboards are not always used to

their full potential and interactively. Measures taken to improve the quality and consistency in marking and assessment are beginning to take effect. The regular marking of pupils' work using the agreed marking scheme is evident in pupils' English and mathematics books. The quality of teachers' comments to help pupils improve their work is better than at the time of the last visit. Pupils understand the mark scheme code and how to judge the outcomes of their own work. They now know more about the targets they have but are not clear about how these can be translated into improving their reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils do not always respond to the comments teachers make in their books and this is an aspect which requires further development. Fortnightly scrutinies of teachers' planning and pupils' work are helping to retain the focus on sustaining improvement.

'Non negotiable' expectations have been introduced to improve pupils' handwriting and presentation. Presentation is much better overall but still requires improvement in the classes where the teaching is weakest. A stronger emphasis on completing homework is also helping pupils to continue their learning outside school. Using assessment knowledge to inform the planning of future teaching, the successful modelling of writing and improving the use of the plenary to assess and consolidate learning are aspects of teaching that remain priorities for improvement.

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 at the time of the last visit and not reported on this time

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved since the last monitoring visit. The headteacher continues to provide strong and purposeful leadership. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher has strengthened the leadership team and a greater share of leadership is now taken by other members of staff. The headteacher has reviewed progress against the post Ofsted action plan for the autumn term and drawn up another plan which outlines improvement priorities for the spring. The SEF has undergone further updating and the latest version will be discussed with governors at their spring term meeting. Action is being taken to tackle inadequate teaching and

a great deal of support has been given to teachers who need to improve the most. The school's capacity for improvement has been strengthened further. Strong emphasis continues to be placed on raising standards and achievement in English and mathematics. Improvements in tracking progress and analysing assessment data have helped the leadership team to identify where progress is not as good as it should be. Following the leadership and guidance provided by the headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics are monitoring and evaluating teachers' planning and pupils' work more systematically. They have produced useful reports on the progress made by pupils in English and mathematics in the autumn term after analysing the school's tracking data. They recognise that they now need to look more closely at the performance of different groups of pupils and analyse assessments in each year group to identify the gaps in pupils' learning. There are plans to increase further their knowledge of provision when they undertake lesson observations with the headteacher.

Additional guidance on evaluating curriculum subjects has been given to all subject leaders. Reports have been written on current provision in ICT and science, although they do not contain much detail about pupils' progress. It is expected that all subject leaders will have completed an initial audit of provision by the end of the spring term and written reports for staff and governors to guide further improvements. The SENCO continues to manage successfully the support provided for pupils with learning difficulties and monitor their progress. Further monitoring of the quality of the support provided by teachers and learning support assistants is planned, as well as establishing a programme of intervention sessions to help targeted pupils to catch up. Two teaching assistants have successfully taken on the management of the pupils' support groups and the school's reward system.

The work of the governing body continues to improve. Governors are better informed and more focused on school improvement. Training and advice has been used well, as have the good organisational structures put in place by the headteacher. Governors' visits follow the agreed protocols and concentrate on the key issues for improvement. Reports from visits show that governors are posing useful questions which might be discussed at governors' meetings and lead to improvement. Key governors visit the school regularly and give the headteacher good support. The governing body is working in a more systematic way and challenging the school to do better.

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 – good progress

External support

The headteacher and governors continue to value the support they receive from the local authority. Good support is provided by the link adviser who makes regular contact with the headteacher to discuss and evaluate the school's progress. Guidance from English and mathematics consultants has helped improve the effectiveness of subject leadership. Support for improving the quality of teaching and learning has been less successful. Useful guidance and training continue to be offered to the governing body to improve its effectiveness. The LA behaviour support team led a very successful training session for staff and governors on the issue of bullying. They also spent several weeks in the school collecting pupils' views about their enjoyment of school, establishing support groups and setting up the reward system.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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



Robert McKeown
H M Inspector