

15 October 2007

Mr David Deane
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Primary School
Hadfield Street
Higher Broughton
Salford
M7 4XG

Dear Mr Deane

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

Following my visit with Mr Roger Gill, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 October, 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 July 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 11 – 12 October 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, a representative of the governing body, a representative from the local authority (LA) and nominated staff.

Context

Since the last visit in March 2007 two class teachers, one in Year 5 and another in Year 2, have resigned. Both the posts have been filled. A Year 6 teacher has been appointed following decisions taken to split Year 6 into two classes. The school is part of a national programme for schools in challenging circumstances and a seconded headteacher supported the school in the second part of the summer term to improve standards and the quality of teaching and learning in literacy. Changes have been made to timings within the school day to increase the amount of time to teach reading to the oldest pupils.

Achievement and standards

The 2007 results show significant improvement in the standards and achievement pupils reach by end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 made very good progress as a result of intensive support. They met, and many surpassed, their challenging targets. Achievement for these pupils is very good. The school met, for the first time, national minimum targets for performance, although standards remain below average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils made satisfactory progress in the lessons seen during the inspection.

Teacher assessments and test results show that pupils' progress across the school reflects a more varied pattern between classes and subjects. The majority of pupils, including some who are recently arrived in this country and pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. A small, but increasing number, are making good progress in response to the modification of teaching strategies to tackle gaps in their earlier learning and to secure pupils' understanding of basic concepts. Despite this work, class teachers' evaluations show that, for small numbers of pupils, their needs are not adequately met. These pupils include some who have special educational needs, those who are vulnerable and pupils at early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. The school's systems to record the progress these pupils make and to check their progress in reaching the targets set in their individual learning plans show a similar pattern. Evaluation and use of this information to identify when each pupil is ready to move on, or where and why they are struggling, are inconsistent across the school. The school recognises this gap in current practice. Action to tackle the issue is in its infancy. The school is at early stages in using a specialist computer program to support more frequent analysis and evaluation of progress.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to respond well to the positive atmosphere in school. In assemblies, their attitudes and behaviour are first-rate. They are thoughtful, reflective and thoroughly enjoy the competitive elements, such as the cup for the most house points. This, for example, has had a strong effect on attendance, which continues to be above the national average. Pupils try hard in lessons and behave well for the most part. Sometimes lessons lack vitality or do not involve pupils so well in talking about their own ideas and this leads to inattention. Pupils feel well cared for and admire what the school is doing to make them fit and healthy. The school council is just beginning to provide a voice for pupils' ideas and those chosen as members feel proud to be taking a lead.

Quality of provision

The school has maintained the satisfactory level of teaching and learning, which was present at the last visit. This is an achievement since the teaching staff has changed a great deal in the last few months. Several new staff have been inducted well and are already contributing valuable ideas, which have improved pupils' performance in, for example, writing and information and communication technology. Good teaching is characterised by lessons in which programmes of work are closely geared to the needs of the pupils at all levels of ability. Moreover, there is a lively interplay of conversation between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils. In this way, pupils gain an immediate understanding of what is going well and what could be improved in relation to the lesson's objective. Occasionally, some lessons are outstanding because the skill and enthusiasm of teaching cause pupils to race ahead. By contrast, satisfactory teaching, which applies to the majority of lessons, helps most pupils reach the required objectives, but on occasions teachers seem to do more work than the pupils. In those lessons, pupils who are learning English as an additional language, for example, need more regular practice at speaking in class than is currently the case.

The school has identified correctly that some vulnerable pupils are not learning well enough. Teaching is not rigorous enough in setting clear lesson targets for them or in assessing how well they are reached. Despite these remaining weaknesses, teachers have raised their expectations and most pupils know, more clearly, what is required of them. This resulted, for example, in the vastly improved standards at the end of Year 6 and Year 2 in 2007. This was achieved through teachers having a precise knowledge of pupils' attainment and planning well-tailored tasks to improve achievement. In this way, some pupils completed two years' work in one year. The school has correctly identified that this kind of catching up should be present in all classes and is working hard to achieve this. Assessment has improved, so that teachers are more knowledgeable about pupils' prior attainment and teachers regularly evaluate pupils' progress in relation to achieving weekly literacy and

numeracy objectives. However, information from these assessments is not used well in all cases to give teachers a clear steer about the rate of progress expected. That is why some groups of pupils, such as pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those for whom English is an additional language, do not always progress as well as they could.

Thorough monitoring of teaching has identified the need to improve pupils' comprehension in reading, breadth of vocabulary, sentence construction and punctuation, as well as their calculations and mental arithmetic in mathematics. Progress in pupils' learning in these issues is piecemeal throughout the school because the action plans are only part-way to being fulfilled. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress has been made to date in these respects. The distances still to travel in reading, writing and mathematics are recognised within the school's plans.

Teaching contains far more consistency now in some areas of the school, for example, in the way learning is planned for and promoted in Years 3 to 6. Where methods lack consistency, pupils do not progress so quickly. For instance, methods in Year 1 are not closely enough allied to those in the Foundation Stage for those children who still need to consolidate their learning through play. Teaching across the Foundation Stage and Year 1 is satisfactory, but it lacks the good features which have accelerated progress elsewhere in the school.

The quality of the curriculum was not investigated during this visit. Care, guidance and support continue to be satisfactory. Pupils with special needs and those who are vulnerable speak positively about the pastoral care and support they receive. Pupils feel their concerns are listened to. In the last few weeks pupils note that they are beginning to acquire new skills to support them with numeracy and literacy. Many pupils, throughout the school, feel more confident as learners: they state that teaching provides them with good advice because marking is better at pointing out what needs to be improved.

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.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has continued to drive improvement firmly and set the agenda for the school's further development. Since the last visit the school has maintained strengths in pupils' attendance and behaviour and has brought about substantial improvements in standards and achievement for most pupils. The quality of teaching has been maintained, despite several changes to staffing, and staff morale and pupils' attitudes to learning continue to improve. The school has achieved the governors' challenging targets for pupils' performance and met the improvement goals in the LA's 2006-2007 statement of action. Plans to raise attainment in literacy through a sustained focus on reading are well founded, although not at the expense of writing and other areas. Systems to check the quality of teaching and learning regularly are firmly embedded, but the emphasis is on what teachers are doing rather than how well pupils are learning.

The school's hard work to raise standards, which it has done well, and the induction of several staff, has meant the school has not sufficiently prioritised the areas for further improvement noted in the previous monitoring visit. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in the short term are not identifying sufficiently where some pupils are failing to thrive, nor are they leading to quick action to tackle this. The coordinators' role in evaluating the quality of learning in the areas for which they are responsible is not sufficiently embedded, but some have made substantial improvement to resources and are contributing ideas well in a relatively short period of time. Consequently, the headteacher is undertaking the additional burden of monitoring most of this work.

The school's evaluation is adequately highlighting areas for development - for example, it has identified individuals who make little or no progress - but current action planning does not show the measures to be taken to tackle this.

The school's special measures monitoring group and the governing body are well informed about developments in the school. However, records of meetings do not show sufficient activity or challenge in questioning why some of the most vulnerable pupils are not making adequate progress.

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.

External support

The quality and impact of the support provided for the school by the LA are satisfactory. Work to improve the quality of teaching and learning contributed to improvements in standards and achievement in Year 2 and Year 6 in 2007. The use of consultants, the further support for Year 6 pupils and planning and guidance provided through the raising attainment plan match the school's priorities for improvement. However, much of this work is at an early stage.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure coordinators undertake their role in evaluating the quality of learning in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Improve school development planning to demonstrate how the learning needs of all pupils will be met to enable them all to make progress.
- Support governors to enable them to challenge and hold the school to account.