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Mrs G Howell
The Acting Headteacher
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School
Highdown Drive
Littlehampton
West Sussex
BN17 6HL

Dear Mrs Howell

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 July 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 June 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

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, other staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the start of this term the school has been led by one of the two acting headteachers previously in post. The other acting headteacher took on the role of consultant and her contract finishes at the end of this term. She will be replaced by another consultant headteacher on a part time basis from the start of next term. The substantive headteacher will not be returning. One teacher, on long term sick leave, has left and been replaced by a supply teacher for the whole of this term. Three other teachers are leaving at the end of term and vacancies remain for one full and

one part time post in September. A significant number of pupils have continued to leave and join the school other than at the standard times. A sizeable minority of those arriving speak English as an additional language so that the proportion of such pupils at the school has risen sharply. The school recently had an inspection for schools with a religious character under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 from which the provisional outcome was satisfactory overall.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' achievement continues to improve and is satisfactory in lessons and over time. Unvalidated data from the most recent national assessments for Year 2 pupils shows they have made satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics in the last year. The picture is similar for Year 6 pupils, based on unvalidated national test results and the school's assessment data in mathematics, English and science. In all years, mathematics and writing have improved the most because of the initially high priority given to these areas. However, better progress is now evident in reading and science after the school rightly increased the emphasis on them in the last two terms. Although standards in all years remain below national averages, the progress made is gaining momentum and the pupils are beginning to make up the ground they have lost. Those for whom English is an additional language are doing better and make satisfactory progress because teaching meets their needs better.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science and improve pupils' achievement, taking swift and effective action when they do not make enough progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils' behaviour is good both in and out of lessons. The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to learning when lessons are well paced and tasks clearly structured. Pupils respond well to the more numerous opportunities for active learning. On the occasions where lessons continue to be less engaging, a minority are not able to sustain their focus. A significant number of pupils lack skills in learning independently, for example finding it difficult to push themselves during group work if not closely supervised. Most pupils enjoy school, reporting that there is little bullying and that behaviour is well managed by teachers and other adults. Relationships with teachers and between pupils are usually good. The school has worked hard to maintain the improvements seen in attendance. It is broadly average and is well monitored to enable poorly attending pupils to be supported. Unauthorised absence has risen slightly; it is just above the national average and the school reports that action by the LA education welfare team is not always swift enough in helping to tackle those parents whose children are missing school for inappropriate reasons.

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

- improve attendance by taking firm action to discourage absences for holidays in term-time – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning has improved steadily and staffing has been relatively stable since the last monitoring inspection. However, Year 4 has continued to experience changes of teacher, with a long term supply teacher covering this term. Forthcoming staff changes for some classes cast doubt over whether improvements in teaching and learning can be sustained.

Planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons has improved and meets the needs of most pupils well by building on prior learning. Nevertheless, it is not always clear how the pupils with additional learning needs, such as those for whom English is an additional language, are going to have their needs met. The majority of lessons are well structured, starting with clear sharing of objectives and containing a wider range of ways to learn. Teachers make growing use of visual material to communicate tasks and to sustain pupils' focus. Interactive whiteboards, where available, are used more effectively to engage pupils, although the best practice in encouraging the pupils to interact with the boards is not consistent. In meeting pupils' differing needs, much emphasis is rightly placed on group work. The quality of these activities has improved because of better briefing for additional adults who often work with small groups, and better monitoring by teachers. Whilst this is true as a general rule, there are occasions where too little is achieved because group tasks are not made clear to pupils as they break out from whole class work or because teachers do not check their progress regularly enough.

Classroom support for pupils speaking English as an additional language has improved because better approaches are adopted both for early stage learners and for more established non native English speakers. Personnel from the LA have worked well, both directly with pupils and to support teachers, in using appropriate strategies. However, recording these pupils' progress and ensuring a consistent approach to their induction, establishing their educational experience and attainment are not rigorous enough.

Using assessment to support learning is now a feature of more lessons. There is increased evidence of teachers checking pupils' progress, for example by asking questions, by involving pupils in assessing each others' work, and through individual discussion. Although the best examples seen are not universally reflected in all lessons, it reflects well on the school's work to improve this area. Pupils' awareness of what they need to do in order to improve has gained strength, with good practice, such as target cards, now being more common. Nevertheless, too many pupils are still unclear as to how their targets relate to current work and too few are involved in deciding how to improve. Marking is satisfactory and sometimes good because more regular reference is made to ways forward and, in the best seen, to a pupil's individual targets. Effective plenary stages are a feature of most lessons, enabling

pupils to summarise learning. Tracking pupils' progress over time continues to improve with good data collected in reading to match that in writing and mathematics. Tracking progress in science lags behind but there are robust plans to ensure it is rigorous from the start of next term.

Good steps to improve the curriculum include making better links between subjects, ensuring tasks are more engaging, and developing a secure programme for guided reading. Opportunities to develop literacy in other subjects are increasingly effective. However, less able pupils' progress is sometimes slowed by weak writing skills in lessons where too much emphasis is given to writing and not enough to the subject itself.

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

- ensure that in all lessons the pace of learning is quick, that behaviour is managed consistently and that work builds on what pupils of differing abilities already know – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has taken a more strategic role this term. With the support of the consultant headteacher, she provides good leadership and stability at a time when changes in staffing and uncertainties over long term headship mean the school lacks secure capacity to improve. Better assessment, teaching and planning are more embedded, yielding better achievement. The headteachers' monitoring and evaluation are accurate, enabling progress to be checked, next steps to be planned, and staff to be supported through development activities. The school improvement plan has been suitably sharpened in relation to leadership and management by defining the contribution of those in positions of responsibility, such as subject leaders. Rewritten job descriptions ensure that postholders can be held accountable. There is a good awareness that the school improvement plan now requires updating to reflect progress made and new priorities, such as clarifying who leads the increasing amount of work to support pupils for whom English is an additional language.

As a result of effective action by the headteachers and LA personnel, the capacity of staff in leadership roles is developing well and is satisfactory overall. The deputy headteacher is more active, for example coordinating preparation for the section 48 inspection and showing more independence in leading mathematics. Subject leaders for English and science have greater involvement in lesson monitoring, planning scrutiny, and data analysis. The outcomes are used with increasing confidence to target the next stages of development. The leadership of foundation subjects is underdeveloped by comparison.

The governing body remains committed to the school and works hard on its behalf. Governors maintain a close focus on progress, communicating well with key school staff and gathering a good range of evidence in order to challenge the school.

However, they acknowledge the need to be more independent when analysing assessment data to check pupils' progress over time.

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

- ensure that the school improvement plan has measurable targets that relate to pupils' progress, and make better use of monitoring information to improve teaching and learning – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has supported the school well and is committed to providing a good level of support in the future, specifically to ensure the school has good teachers. Its monitoring continues to be effective, enabling it to judge the impact of its work and to focus further support. Personnel from the ethnic minority action team are working well with the school to improve provision for the pupils for whom English is an additional language and the impact is being felt. However, help is required for the school to develop consistent procedures which ensure these pupils make good progress from the start.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure good quality headship and teaching for the long term.
- Establish effective, standardised best practice procedures for the induction, assessment and tracking of pupils with English as an additional language.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's and Young People's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
H M Inspector