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10 May 2007

Mr Ian Walton
The Advisory Headteacher
St Richard's Catholic Primary School
Castle Avenue
Dover
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Dear Mr Walton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST RICHARD'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Fiona Robinson and Sally Hall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 May 2007, 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 November 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 lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the advisory headteacher, senior and middle managers, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils.

Context

The substantive headteacher in post at the time of the last inspection left the school earlier this year. The advisory headteacher, who had been working part time with the school since December 2006, was appointed as the full time advisory headteacher from January 2007. One member of staff left the school and a new teacher on a temporary contract has been appointed. The governing body has undergone changes in personnel and a new chair of

governors has very recently been appointed. Preparations to appoint a new headteacher are fully in hand and the governors and local authority are aware of the importance of their actions in this respect.

Achievement and standards

National test results for 2006 show that standards at Key Stage 2 were significantly below those expected nationally. There was significant underachievement by most Year 6 pupils in mathematics and science, considering their starting points.

Since January 2007, the school has introduced a whole school system of assessing attainment for pupils in Years 1 to 6 and tracking pupils' progress. Class teachers and subject leaders are becoming more confident in making accurate assessments and monitoring progress. Because of the recent introduction of the assessment systems, there was insufficient data at the time of the visit to make secure judgements about the rates of pupil progress. Teachers are making better use of assessment information to plan work that is more accurately matched to pupils' needs. Intervention programmes, such as the work with 'focus groups', are often carefully planned and monitored in order to raise standards. Teachers use assessment data to set and review pupils' individual targets.

Lessons observations and scrutiny of pupils' books confirm the school's own analysis that there are small pockets of rapid progress, for example in Year 2 and Year 6 writing. However, the school knows that there is still much to do. There are some significant inconsistencies in the rates of progress across year groups and across subjects. The gains made by most pupils are not yet rapid enough to close the gap between what they are achieving and what they are capable of. The school recognises the need to refine further its systems to identify and tackle the underachievement of individual pupils.

Most pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities continue to make satisfactory progress because the support they receive is closely matched to their needs.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- raise achievement and standards, especially in mathematics and writing – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They cooperate well with one another and display positive attitudes to their work. Most pupils work hard and behave well. Occasionally, pupils lack enjoyment and motivation when they have to listen for too long in lessons. Attendance is broadly average and the

school is working hard to encourage pupils to make the best progress they can by attending regularly. The school council gives pupils an effective say in the life of the school.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the inspection. The majority of lessons are now at least satisfactory. However, there is still not enough good teaching to address the gaps in pupils' learning and accelerate the progress made by learners. Teachers follow a collaborative approach to planning which has resulted in an improved range of suitable learning activities. However, in some lessons teachers are not taking sufficient account of pupils' individual needs and planned activities do not always provide adequate challenge for each pupil. Teaching in Reception is satisfactory and there is an appropriate amount of adult-led and child-led activities.

Most teachers share clear expectations with their pupils. In the best lessons, the pace of learning is brisk and pupils respond well and make good progress. However, time is not always managed so effectively. The pace of learning in some lessons is too slow when pupils are required to listen for long periods of time, providing too little time for pupils to reflect on their learning or for teachers to take account of the learning needs of individual pupils.

The school is developing a more relevant and interesting curriculum in order to raise standards. For example, the science subject leader has introduced a new scheme of work which offers pupils more opportunities to develop their investigative and recording skills. Pupils' learning in mathematics is improving as lessons now include more practical activities. There are more opportunities for pupils to develop their investigative skills and use of data. The school is working hard to improve pupils' writing skills and is modifying the curriculum to develop writing through cross-curricular activities and more creative teaching styles. The school has identified the need to develop and enrich experiences for Foundation Stage children in the outdoor environment by improving resources.

At its best, the marking of pupils' work is accurate and pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve. As a result, pupils make satisfactory progress. However, some marking is still not good enough to enable pupils to move on in their learning quickly enough. Some work is unmarked and other marking offers too little guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve. The school has implemented a system of setting targets for groups of pupils in each class. However, some of these targets are not always matched closely enough to pupils' individual abilities. Most teachers are now providing sufficient guidance to help pupils improve and are reviewing targets on a regular basis. The school is involving parents and carers in their children's learning by encouraging their involvement in consultations and meetings and through the sharing of targets.

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

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching, improving particularly the way teachers engage pupils' interest and make learning relevant to the needs of individual pupils – satisfactory
- implement rigorous and robust procedures for assessing pupils' progress so that pupils and staff have an accurate understanding of how pupils are doing and know what needs to be done to improve – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management, including the governance of the school, are satisfactory. The recently appointed advisory headteacher has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has brought a clear sense of purpose and educational direction. His initiatives have led to improvements, especially in the quality of teaching. He knows that standards must improve and in order to achieve this there have to be further improvements in teaching, the tracking of pupils' progress, marking and assessment, and in aspects of leadership and management. He knows that there is still some teaching which is satisfactory or inadequate. The positive changes that have been made have yet to be fully embedded and sustained over time.

Since his appointment, and with the support of the local authority, the advisory headteacher has gained the confidence of the staff who increasingly share his clear vision of how improvements are to be achieved. The headteacher is working with the staff to enable them to develop consistent and high quality teaching and learning. Assessment and recording processes have improved.

Subject leaders, especially in English and mathematics, are beginning to become more accountable for the outcomes in their subjects and are expanding their roles in monitoring teaching and learning and in raising standards. There is greater collaboration amongst staff in day-to-day planning, especially in literacy and numeracy.

The governing body is provided with more information which is enabling them to be increasingly effective. The chair of governors is well informed and determined to ensure that the governing body develops its awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and fulfils its role well. At present the governors are at a very early stage in their ability to act as a critical friend. Governors are supportive of the advisory headteacher and value the support given to the school by the local authority, especially the school improvement partner. Governors recognise that a central priority is to appoint a suitable substantive headteacher.

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

- improve the quality of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority provides good support for the school. Support has been provided through training sessions, guidance from primary strategy advisers to strengthen the work of subject leaders, and by an advanced skills teacher to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Through monthly monitoring visits, the school improvement partner has developed a good relationship with the advisory headteacher and governors and provides them with appropriate support.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures is satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The governors should appoint a suitably qualified and experienced person as headteacher.
- Raise the standards of achievement in English and mathematics and especially in the key basic skills of writing and number
- Raise the standard of teaching and learning across the school, especially in quickening the pace of learning and ensuring work is well matched to each pupil's ability.
- Further refine the school's assessment systems to identify and tackle any underachievement of individual pupils.
- Improve the quality of marking, ensuring it provides more guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the leadership and management of all senior and middle leaders, especially in monitoring teaching and learning and in raising the levels of pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Managing Director for Children, Families and Education for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hartland
HM Inspector