

Cambridge Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01223 578500
Direct F 01223 578501
Email - risp.inspections@camb-ed.com



31 October 2007

Mrs. Lynne Wilson-Leary
The Headteacher
St Catherine's Church of England VC Primary School
Park Road
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG12 0AW

Dear Mrs Wilson-Leary

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST CATHERINE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Rhona Seviour HMI and John Williams HMI to your school on 16/17 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 September 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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans, and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire

Yours sincerely

David Jones
H M Inspector

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 16 October 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school in operation, scrutinised documents and the pupils' work. They met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the vice-chair of governors, and two colleagues from the local authority (LA).

Context

At the start of the academic year, the headteacher was able to appoint a literacy coordinator and a curriculum leader for Reception and Key Stage 1. The post of deputy headteacher remains vacant.

Achievement and standards

The provisional results of the 2007 teacher assessments at Key Stage 1 are above average in mathematics and reading although the proportion achieving the higher level 3 was below expectations. The outcomes of the writing assessment were disappointing and below average. The provisional outcomes of the 2007 national tests for pupils in Year 6 were above the national average in English, mathematics and science although the proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 5 in mathematics was low.

Evidence from a scrutiny of the pupils' books and the school's robust assessment data base indicates that most pupils are working at an appropriate level in Year 6 although the match of task to the pupils learning needs could be further refined for the higher achieving pupils. However, a review of the pupils' attainment on entry to Year 2 and their current standards of achievement indicate a pattern of regression that relates to low expectations. Writing in other subjects includes appropriate topic detail; however, marking focuses on presentation rather than developing a higher level subject response.

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

- Raise expectations of pupils' achievements in mathematics and science by introducing rigorous programmes to improve the quality of teaching in both subjects – satisfactory progress
- Raise the quality of pupils' writing and reinforce the development of writing skills in all subjects – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' response to teaching is positive, particularly so when it is challenging. In lessons pupils are compliant and often keen to do well. However, where introductions are lengthy or tasks do not engage them, pupils begin to fidget and their concentration wanes. Behaviour around the school and in the communal areas is good. Attendance has improved and is above the national average as a result of effective monitoring procedures. Only one pupil was absent on the first day of the inspection.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching continues to improve but, as at the time of the previous visit, weaknesses remain.

In this inspection 12 lessons were observed; four were good, six were satisfactory and two were judged to be inadequate. In the best lessons, teachers had a secure knowledge of the subject and, as a result, their explanations were clear and accurate. There were smooth transitions between activities and the pace of learning was brisk. In these lessons there were ample opportunities for the children to work independently and to think creatively. The very best lessons were well planned to include additional challenge for the more able pupils. There are good relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and children in all classes.

Where lessons were inadequate a lack of clarity in teachers' explanations, expectations and questioning was evident. In these lessons, the children were often confused about the purpose of the activities and were not given the guidance needed to help them achieve.

Three members of staff, including the headteacher, carried out joint observations with HMI and in all cases there was agreement about the strengths of the lessons observed and the areas for development. However, in monitoring carried out just before the inspection visit, the local authority and the school reached more favourable judgements than those of HMI and so more work is needed to ensure consistency in teaching quality.

The headteacher monitors the quality of teachers' work very closely. Her observations are perceptive and accurate and she provides helpful and detailed feedback to staff. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations and increasing their effectiveness. Teachers are self-critical and keen to improve their expertise; the training and guidance provided by the school has contributed to increased consistency in the quality of their planning and more attention to the assessment of children's progress. However, the school knows that the improvements in planning achieved so far are not always evident in teachers' practice. In particular, activities in some lessons are not matched well enough to the children's needs and do not provide them with the challenge they need to make good progress. In addition, weaknesses persist in the use of National Curriculum levels to set targets and the

development of carefully structured questioning. The children are not aware of their National Curriculum target level and questioning is not used skilfully enough to develop the children's thinking or to deepen their understanding.

As at the time of the previous visit, the work of the learning support assistants (LSA) could be more effectively directed by teachers. In particular, teachers could ensure that teaching assistants are aware of the National Curriculum levels at which the children are working so that their expertise is used to best effect.

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

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers make full use of assessment data in their planning so that their teaching is well matched to pupils' individual needs – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher has done a great deal to address the major weaknesses in provision detailed in the section 5 inspection report. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 1 and 2 improved in 2007 although weaknesses remain in some areas. Assessment data is robust and managed effectively. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has been developed. This is generally rigorous but the variations in performance noted by senior staff and highlighted during this inspection indicate that some staff continue to under perform. Current efforts to recruit a deputy headteacher who can model good classroom practice have as yet proved unsuccessful. Governors need to seek additional support from the LA to address this important area.

A LA action group currently hold the governing body, delegated financial and personnel responsibilities. The issues that relate to adjustments in the staffing structure have been resolved as have the matters raised by HM Customs and Revenue.

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

- improve leadership and management at all levels and develop a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation that focuses on how pupils' achievement can be improved – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has provided considerable support to the governing body through the Action Group; however, it will be important that the authority can confirm that governance is satisfactory and can sustain the focus on school improvement before special measures can be removed. The pressing need to appoint a deputy headteacher to support the head's considerable efforts is an area where further LA support is required.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eliminate the remaining weaknesses in teaching and learning.
- Ensure that teacher assessment in Key Stage 1 is secure and can meet the demands of moderation.