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Miss L Nutt
The Advisory Headteacher
St Richard's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Miss Nutt

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

Following my visit with Suzanne Gerred, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 October 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 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 Education for Kent, and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

David Curtis
Additional Inspector

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

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 10 October 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the advisory headteacher, senior and middle managers, the chair of governors, and representatives of the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other staff, pupils and parents.

Context

The advisory headteacher, who was in post at the time of the first monitoring inspection, left the position at the end of the summer term. A new advisory headteacher was appointed from the beginning of September. Two full-time class teachers were appointed at the same time, as was a part-time teacher who shares a class with the deputy headteacher. Despite their best efforts, the governors, LA and diocese have been unable to appoint a substantive headteacher.

Achievement and standards

The results of the most recent national tests for pupils in Year 6 showed significant improvement in reading and writing, especially at the higher Level 5. Standards were above the national average. The school is justifiably proud of this improvement. Evidence from this visit indicates that pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 achieve well and are on course to reach above average standards in reading and writing by the time they leave the school. In Year 5, pupils show a great love of poetry and explain the use of metaphors and similes with total confidence. In Year 6, some of the pupils' 'horror stories' are of a very high standard.

The school's most recent analysis of pupils' progress in other year groups revealed that too many pupils in Years 1 to 4 make insufficient progress in writing and mathematics. These inconsistencies in progress across the school remain from the previous visit, although there is evidence that this term that a higher proportion now make satisfactory progress in these year groups. However, the scrutiny of pupils' work shows rates of progress are still not fast enough for all pupils. As the school identifies underachievement accurately, there is a need now to ensure that the pace of teaching ensures that more pupils make consistently good progress. The good support for 'focus groups' identified in the previous visit remains a positive feature.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support in lessons and make satisfactory progress because work is closely matched to their learning needs.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

This was not a focus of this monitoring visit. However, the positive features identified in the previous inspection report and monitoring visit are still evident in pupils' positive attitudes to school.

Quality of provision

Although there are pockets of good or better teaching in lessons, the overall picture from all evidence, including work in pupils' books, is that too much is satisfactory. There is still not enough good teaching to accelerate progress and raise standards in every year group.

Most teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively and establish a calm working environment which helps pupils to focus on their learning. As at the last monitoring inspection, teachers have clear expectations about what they want pupils to learn and share this with them at the start of lessons. Most teachers are getting better at taking account of pupils' individual needs and at planning work at different levels. In the very best lessons, different groups are aware of what they need to do to succeed and work provides the right level of challenge for them. However, there are still times where work is not matched well enough to pupils' needs and interests and this leads to high noise levels and some minor misbehaviour. There are still instances where the pace of learning is too slow and where pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet.

The school has recently put in place a satisfactory system to keep track of pupils' progress and to identify gaps in learning. It means that all teachers can now keep a close eye on pupils who are not doing as well as they should and those who would benefit from additional challenge. However, the system has not been in place long enough to make a significant impact on pupils' achievement and standards.

Most teachers provide pupils with regular feedback about their work, usually identifying if the expected learning outcome has been achieved. However, the school recognises that there is still some way to go in ensuring consistency across all classes. Not all teachers provide useful comments to help pupils know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Not all check that pupils follow up their comments where required, particularly in relation to careless presentation. Pupils are set targets in writing and in mathematics. These help pupils in different groups to know what they need to do, for example to improve their punctuation. However, these are quite a new feature and there is some inconsistency in how they are used. They are rarely referred to in teachers' marking or in lessons.

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 what needs to be done to improve – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The governing body, LA and diocese continue to explore all possible avenues to secure the appointment of a substantive headteacher. In the short time since her appointment, the new advisory headteacher has identified the school's strengths and areas still in need of improvement. She ensured that a detailed and rigorous analysis was carried out of pupils' performance in both the statutory and non statutory tests in 2007. The results of this analysis give the school a very clear picture of standards and progress, especially for those pupils who underachieve. This information is used to set targets for pupils, although the use of these targets is not securely embedded in all classes. The advisory headteacher knows that there is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning and in the implementation of new policies, such as marking. She recognises the need to improve consistency as a priority and is working hard to drive the improvements that are still necessary.

Subject leaders for English and mathematics have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects. Writing is rightly identified as an ongoing priority in English, including handwriting and presentation. Similarly, the need to focus on pupils' use and application of mathematical skills is a key area to develop. Both subject leaders have a stronger awareness of their subjects because they are more effective in their monitoring roles.

The chair of governors has continued to work tirelessly to ensure that the governing body is an effective and functioning body. It now has a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The chair recognises that the key priorities are now for the governing body to ensure that all policies and statutory duties are up to date and fully in place, and that developing the governors' role in holding the school to account for the standards it achieves is essential in the next stage of its development. Governors value the leadership of the advisory headteacher and the continuing effective support from the LA.

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

- improve the quality of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The LA continues to provide good support for the school. The School Improvement Partner, primary strategy advisers and advanced skills teachers play an important and effective role in supporting the school.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should maintain its focus on the four key areas from the inspection report.