

23 November 2007

Mr Paul Brown
Headteacher
St Thomas's CE Primary School
Kendal Green
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 5PP

Dear Mr Brown

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Alastair Younger AI to your school on 21 and 22 November 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following conditions:

- monitoring is provided by a partner school, Ghyllside School;
- the entitlement to time away from class teaching is guaranteed.

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, Carlisle Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Gill Salter-Smith

Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST THOMAS'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leaders English, mathematics and science, the coordinator for special educational needs, the school council, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

A new headteacher was appointed in September 2007. Three members of the teaching staff left the school at the end of August and another teacher is on long-term absence. One class is covered by a qualified teacher on a temporary contract. Two newly qualified teachers have been appointed on temporary contracts this term and they receive support from a nearby school and from within the school. Since the last monitoring visit, national data on the school's results in the 2007 national tests and assessments has become available.

Achievement and standards

The school's results in the 2007 national tests and assessments for seven and 11-year-olds show a significant improvement over those in 2006. This is particularly the case in writing and mathematics, whereas in reading improvement was less marked. Girls attained better results than the boys, especially in reading. The results show that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made good progress. The school's targets for 11-year-olds were exceeded in mathematics but not met in English. The results also show that the school has begun to improve pupils' achievement as they move through the school, but more so in mathematics and science than in English.

The school's own information from assessments shows that most pupils are making progress towards their targets in numeracy and reading at the rate expected of them. Progress towards targets in writing is more variable. In a few classes a significant minority of pupils did not meet their targets in writing.

In lessons and in pupils' work there is evidence of improving progress. There is greater breadth in the pupils' writing, often stimulated by work in other subjects. There are many examples of imaginative and well structured poetry and stories, and pupils show a greater capacity to write at length. However, spelling and punctuation remain weaknesses, even for some higher attaining pupils. Pupils are taking greater care to present their written work well and produce diagrams and graphs more carefully. Investigative skills have improved in science and pupils are benefiting from more opportunities for practical work in mathematics. There are still inconsistencies between classes in how well pupils record the process of investigation in science.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science - satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure. They are well behaved in lessons. There is a purposeful working atmosphere in classrooms and pupils are eager to learn. Behaviour is good on the school playground and in the dining area. Pupils are happy to take on responsibilities and they often volunteer to help out at lunchtime. The school council has been re-formed this term and is discussing how it can contribute to improvements in the school. Attendance is around average but the attendance of a small number of pupils is poor. The school keeps a close check on attendance. Pupils of concern are identified, families are contacted and support is provided using various local agencies.

Quality of provision

The proportion of good teaching has increased significantly since the previous visit. The school has tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last visit well. Secure systems to assess and track pupils' progress have been introduced. Teachers make far better use of assessment information to plan learning to match different levels of ability. Pupils are fully aware of their short-term targets to guide learning in reading, writing, mathematics and science. They find them helpful and motivating. They provide challenge for pupils and are updated regularly. The targets are not always used to guide pupils' writing well enough when they are writing in the context of other subjects. The introduction of a common approach to planning this term increases the focus on what pupils will learn and ensures that activities are mostly well matched to pupils' different needs and abilities, including the more able pupils. In some lessons it is not made clear to the most able pupils how much more they should be learning.

More attention is being paid to providing excitement and challenge in lessons. Pupils have noticed the difference this term and are enjoying more of their lessons. Opportunities for discussion, debate and drama activities have increased and in most cases are helping to develop pupils' confidence in literacy. Opportunities are sometimes missed to develop pupils' vocabulary and ideas fully when working in role or dramatic situations.

Teachers are making better use of display in their classrooms to support learning. Pupils enjoy the interactive 'working walls' where they are encouraged to solve problems and do tasks related to their work. Pupils' work is valued and displayed around the school. In some classrooms, pupils' work is used to model good writing at different levels of development, but such modelling is not widespread. Teachers make good use of electronic whiteboards to guide learning in lessons but these are not often used by pupils in an interactive way.

Pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own and each other's work, using clear criteria provided by the teachers. The final parts of lessons are used well to encourage pupils to identify what they have learned. A new policy for marking has been adopted across the school. This ensures regular in-depth marking and that pupils make a contribution. There are examples of helpful guidance and supportive comments. However, spelling and punctuation errors are not identified often enough nor are they corrected by pupils.

The pace of learning has improved in most lessons. Occasionally, pupils are not given clear enough time limits for activities when they work independently and urgency is lost and the pace of learning slows. There are times when lesson activities carry on too long and the more able pupils especially do not move on quickly enough to the next tasks. Teachers manage the classrooms well. They give well deserved rewards and set clear expectations of behaviour and conduct. Teaching assistants are contributing well to learning, supporting lower attaining pupils and, at times, higher attaining pupils. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and they have taken part in challenging activities both during and out of lesson time, particularly in mathematics and science. Activities to develop writing skills for these pupils are planned.

Learning in the Foundation Stage is well planned. Good use is made of the indoor and outdoor accommodation to ensure progress in all areas of learning. Assessment is used well to plan and meet children's different needs across the areas of learning.

The school is well advanced in using the new framework for the National Curriculum, which is providing more opportunities for speaking and practical activities to promote learning. Links between subjects are being established and there are examples of good quality writing as a result. There is some good use of mathematics during scientific investigations. The school is in the process of developing an overall curriculum plan that maps the links between the subjects. The development of pupils' information and communication technology skills and their use in other subjects is limited because of the unreliable condition of the computers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Improve teaching by using the information from tracking pupils' progress and making lessons more exciting and challenging - good

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has had a significant impact on accelerating improvement. There is a strong focus on raising standards and improving provision. Staffing has been strengthened and there is a purposeful and positive approach to improvement across the school. The members of an increasingly effective senior team have clear responsibilities and are carrying out their roles well. Subject leaders are held accountable for standards and provision. The rigour of monitoring of teaching and learning has improved. Senior and middle leaders are involved and it is becoming

better focused on supporting improvement. Systems to check on pupils' progress have improved so that individual performance can be tracked more easily and underachievement identified early.

The headteacher has updated the school's self-evaluation and action plan appropriately. Professional development, well supported by the local authority, is helping to bring about improvements. The work of teaching assistants is valued and they are included in professional development activities. Newly qualified teachers are well supported from within the school and by the partner school. The performance management of the headteacher has been carried out by the governing body. However, arrangements for the performance management of other staff are behind schedule.

Governors continue to be very supportive of the school. Since the appointment of the headteacher there has been less need for governors to be involved in the school on a day-to-day basis. They are developing a more systematic approach to monitoring activities and they have undergone training to support this and their role as 'critical friends'.

Many new initiatives and systems have been introduced to improve teaching, learning, the curriculum and leadership. The task now is to sustain these and ensure that they lead to pupils' increased progress and achievement over time.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- ↳ Strengthen leadership and management, particularly the capacity to check on the school's performance and secure rapid and sustained improvement - good

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support. The Intensifying Support Programme was re-launched successfully this term. Staff have embraced this fully and the programme is working effectively to improve teachers' planning and pupils' progress. The work of the local authority's consultants has provided valuable professional development for all staff and leaders and led to improvements in provision. At the request of the school, the local authority has deployed two advanced skills teachers to provide additional support for boys' writing and mathematics for more able pupils. The local authority's statement of action continues to guide improvement and has been improved to identify more tightly focused time targets.

The frequency of visits to the school by the school improvement officer and the frequency of the meetings of the local authority's school specific monitoring group have been reduced as confidence in the school's ability to make improvements builds.