

13 March 2008

Mr David Deane
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School
Hadfield Street
Higher Broughton
Salford
Manchester
M7 4XG

Dear Mr Deane

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Christopher Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in July 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 – good

Newly qualified teachers may 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 receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Salford and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 11 and 12 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, nominated staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA). Inspectors also spoke briefly with a small number of parents and scrutinised the school's analysis of 58 parent responses to their recent questionnaire.

Context

Since the last visit in October 2007 the number of pupils on the school roll has increased slightly to 217. There have been no changes to staffing.

Achievement and standards

Teachers are developing a clear understanding of what pupils know and where there are gaps in their learning. Standards are rising but remain below average. Teachers' assessments show that pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with expectations and most pupils have made above average progress in a term. Throughout the school, increasing numbers of pupils are achieving their individual learning targets in literacy and numeracy. The school's most recent data show that 85% did so in February 2008, an improvement on 72% two months earlier. Since the last visit most pupils have made good progress in reading.

Improved tracking systems and frequent monitoring by teachers enable the school to identify more accurately the small steps made in the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), pupils at early stages of learning English and those who are vulnerable. This enables teachers to take action quickly to modify learning and individual targets to accurately reflect pupils' needs. Since the last visit the progress of pupils with LDD has improved: 73% of pupils achieved the targets in their individual plans. Their progress is in line with expectations and some make good progress. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning English and those who are vulnerable are making good progress. Tailored support for pupils in the Foundation Stage, many of whom are also at early stages of learning English, is effective in developing their speaking and listening skills and in helping them to read.

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

- Raise standards of achievement throughout the school especially for pupils in Key stage 2 – good

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to be positive in their approach to school life. They like the changes taking place in the school and parents are similarly positive. Attendance is above average and a third of pupils have maintained between 99 and 100% attendance since September 2007. The school council is consulted more often and pupils' views and suggestions have influenced the purchase of books and equipment. Pupils say they feel more involved in fundraising activities and particularly enjoyed the recent 'St Thomas has got talent' show. Pupils are adopting a focused and serious approach to learning: their work matters to them, and they want to do well. Vulnerable pupils say they find learning targets helpful and take pride in achieving them.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has continued to improve and good practice is evident in most lessons. Teachers' class management is effective and robust strategies are in place to sustain pupils' attention in lessons. These strategies are used particularly well to bridge the change in expectations of pupils between the Reception and Year 1 classes. Closer collaboration between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is emerging. More able pupils in Year 1 are making good progress in being able to write with greater independence, confidence and coherence. Key Stage 2 lessons actively involve pupils in thinking and discussing learning points with partners. This strategy also helps to support and move pupils on in their learning.

Work is well planned: teachers take note of what pupils already know and use assessment information more effectively to plan activities that match their different needs. This improved level of provision is helping pupils to make up the gaps in their earlier learning. In the best lessons teachers modify plans and teaching strategies further and finely pitch learning to precisely meet the needs of children. In these lessons teachers are skilled in using questioning techniques during lessons to develop more demanding higher level thinking and deductive reasoning.

Changes to the curriculum are helping to support pupils' improved progress. A wide range of intervention programmes, particularly the strong focus on phonics in Key Stage 2, guided reading in Key Stage 1, and the daily 25 minute reading time introduced last term in Year 1 to Year 6 support the improvements noted earlier in pupils' progress in reading. Resources are used well. Displays for learning are good: staff and pupils actively use them to guide, support and exemplify key learning points. For example, Year 5 pupils found the displays of different types of graphs useful in helping them to construct line graphs. Despite the lack of good quality purpose-built resources, staff make good and creative use of found objects in the Foundation Stage to engage children in imaginative outdoor play.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise expectations of what pupils can achieve – good

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides decisive leadership and is purposefully building the capacity of leaders and managers across the school. Since the last visit, systems of monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress are more firmly established. Time for the deputy headteacher to undertake her role in coordinating support for key groups of pupils has been made available. As a result, tighter systems are in place to check the performance of vulnerable pupils and those with LDD. As a result, the school's analysis of the progress of groups of pupils is sharper and reliable. Better use is made of this information to match work to pupils' needs. Subject coordinators have begun to play a stronger role in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and science. Consequently, they are more able to identify strengths and weaknesses in teachers' planning and offer guidance to help teachers to meet pupils' learning needs. The impact of this work is clearly demonstrated in pupils' improved progress in literacy and numeracy. Developments have not yet led to the systematic identification and sharing of best practice. Guidance and resources to support the teaching and development of pupils' scientific investigation skills are developing.

The special measures monitoring group and the governing body demonstrate a more rigorous and searching approach to questioning the headteacher about the developments taking place. Training by the authority and the sharing of school plans and data enables them to gain a more informed view of pupils' progress.

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

- Improve monitoring and evaluation and the use of assessment data to accelerate pupils' progress – good

External support

External support provided by the LA is satisfactory. Subject consultants have contributed well to the development of coordinators' skills and confidence in undertaking lesson observations and are helping them to identify strengths and weaknesses in literacy, numeracy and science. In addition the work of the school improvement officer is appreciated by governors and he has supported them in taking a more active role in assuring the quality of education provided by the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Share the emerging best practice in teaching and in coordinators' practice more systematically.
- Upgrade resources in the Foundation Stage to support children's outdoor play.