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18 March 2008

Mrs R Iannarilli
The Acting Headteacher
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Dartmouth Avenue
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WS3 1SP

Dear Mrs Iannarilli

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

Following my visit with Garth Mutton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 March 2008, 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 June 2007. 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 Walsall and the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 4 and 5 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work. They scrutinised documents, analysed pupils' work, and met with the acting headteacher, the school council, senior teachers, some of the office staff and a representative from Education Walsall. A telephone conversation was held with the vice-chair of governors.

Context

Since the time of the last monitoring visit there have been a number of staffing changes. A leadership consultant has agreed to stay at the school as the acting headteacher until April 2009. One part time teacher in Year 2 left and the other part time teacher was redeployed in December 2007 to provide cover for planning and preparation time. In January 2008 the governors recruited a teacher for Year 2 pupils on a full time temporary contract. The Year 4 teacher left in February 2008 and was also replaced by a temporary teacher. The Reception class teacher has been absent through illness since December 2007. The Reception class has had a number of temporary teachers.

Achievement and standards

Whilst standards across the school remain below the national average, pupil achievement in English and mathematics is beginning to show signs of improvement. Observations of lessons by Education Walsall consultants, the school and HMI confirm that the current rate of progress is generally satisfactory. This reflects improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. A scrutiny of pupils' books from Year 1 to Year 6 shows that progress in mathematics is satisfactory. Progress in writing is improving from a very low base and is broadly satisfactory. Pupils are not achieving as well as they might in their writing because of weaknesses in grammar, including punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

With continued support from Education Walsall consultants, progress in the Nursery has been maintained, with children making satisfactory progress in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. Progress in the Reception class slowed down in the first few weeks of 2008 because of the number of changes in teachers. The current Reception class teacher has been in post for a few weeks. Evidence from recent classroom observations and an analysis of children's work indicates that the rate of progress has quickened and is currently satisfactory.

The school's assessment information, which has been moderated by Education Walsall consultants, shows that standards remain low, particularly in writing. More than half the pupils are still not working at the expected level for their age due to previous poor provision in this subject. The school is aware of this and has recently

introduced additional support for pupils who need further help with their basic literacy skills. Some staff are also beginning to place a greater emphasis on developing pupils' writing skills in lessons other than literacy.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2007:

- increase the rate of pupil progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils generally behave well and have positive attitudes towards learning. Behaviour is good when pupils have the opportunity to take part in tasks that are interesting and capture their imagination. Pupil attendance and punctuality have improved as a result of the new reward systems introduced by the school. Much closer monitoring and increased communication with parents have emphasised the importance of pupils attending regularly. Whilst attendance remains below the national average, which is 94.8%, the proportion of pupils whose attendance was below 90% has almost halved since the previous monitoring visit. The number of pupils who arrive late for school has also reduced.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and ranges from good to inadequate. The majority of teaching in the school is satisfactory. The proportion of inadequate teaching has significantly reduced since the previous monitoring visit. Nevertheless, there are too few lessons that are consistently good or better.

Progress accelerates when pupils have a clear understanding of what they have to do by the end of a lesson. They also achieve well when teachers use a range of resources to explain the techniques they need to use to complete their task successfully. Pupils are effectively challenged when teachers ask questions that extend their thinking and encourage them to give reasons for their responses. However, this good practice is inconsistent.

Senior staff, in collaboration with Education Walsall, have checked the school's assessment information. As a result, teachers have recently acquired an accurate picture of pupils' attainment. Teachers are beginning to use this data to improve their planning and identify tasks for pupils of different abilities. However, in too many lessons, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable because their tasks are either too easy or too difficult. Evidence from pupils' books shows that, in too many instances, pupils are given tasks pitched at the same level of difficulty.

The teacher in the Nursery class has introduced effective systems for recording children's progress in all areas of learning. This is enabling staff in the nursery to plan activities that better meet the needs of different children. The Nursery and Reception staff have also refined their planning to ensure children have regular access to the outdoor area.

Teachers' marking has improved and gives pupils the guidance they need to make better progress and meet their learning targets. However, pupils are not given enough opportunity to think about what their teachers have written. Consequently,

most pupils do not know how to use this guidance to improve their next piece of work or correct the errors that have been made.

Teachers are beginning to enrich the curriculum by making better use of information and communication technology (ICT) and by making more links between subjects. The teaching timetable has been revised and all classes in Key Stages 1 and 2 now use the ICT suite on a regular basis. In Year 6, pupils have used the Internet to research information about the Tudors. They have also created PowerPoint presentations about mountains of the world. Some teachers are increasingly providing pupils with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills across subjects. For example, on Shrove Tuesday, links were made between religious education, literacy and mathematics. Pupils from Years 2 and 4 wrote each other instructions for making pancakes and used their mathematical skills to calculate the ingredients required for a pancake recipe.

The school meets the statutory health and safety requirements. All the necessary safeguarding checks have been completed and the school has compiled a single central record.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by using assessment information to plan lessons that provide sufficient challenge and meet the learning needs of all pupils – satisfactory
- further enrich the curriculum by using information and communication technology (ICT) and developing more effective links between subjects – satisfactory
- improve the care of pupils by ensuring that all statutory requirements are met, in particular regarding pupils' safety – good.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher continues to provide good leadership. In partnership with Education Walsall advisors and consultants, she has successfully used a range of strategies to build staff confidence, improve the quality of teaching and learning and increase the rate of progress made by pupils. The guidance she gives teachers is practical, prioritised, and clearly focused on teachers' individual areas for development. She also checks pupils' progress and reviews teachers' performance on a regular basis. These are all positive developments and have strengthened the school's monitoring and self-evaluation procedures.

Since the previous monitoring visit, the deputy headteacher has become more involved in the day to day management of the school. This has increased the level of support available to the acting headteacher from within the school. It has also enabled the acting headteacher to devote a greater proportion of her time on working with, and supporting, staff to improve their practice.

The acting headteacher and chair of governors have involved staff and governors in completing the school development plan. The plan outlines the responsibilities of all members in the school community and the actions they need to take to help the school improve. Consequently, staff and governors have a greater understanding of the school's priorities. This has also led to a much stronger sense of accountability.

The school development plan contains realistic targets for future development and clearly specifies how actions will be monitored and their impact evaluated. The first formal evaluation of progress by governors and the school leadership team, to measure progress against the school improvement priorities, is due to take place at the end of this month.

The deputy headteacher, and numeracy and literacy coordinators are taking a more active part in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. However, their ability to give effective support to class teachers is still underdeveloped. Their feedback to staff following an evaluation of pupils' work is often too general. It does not make sufficient links to the teachers' individual areas for development or offer staff the specific guidance they need to raise pupil attainment. The deputy headteacher, and numeracy and literacy coordinators meet on a regular basis to discuss the actions they have taken and evaluate the impact of these actions. However, their evaluations lack rigour. The senior leaders do not place enough emphasis on the progress made by pupils and the quality of teaching. The acting headteacher is aware that the senior leaders will need further support. She has sound plans to provide them with training during the next term.

The governing body provides the acting headteacher with good support. The chair of governors meets with the acting headteacher on a regular basis. This enables him to keep up to date with developments within the school. Through regular meetings, governors are increasingly holding the school to account. Some governors have attended staff training and been involved in monitoring pupils' work.

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

- improve the quality of leadership by more consistent, systematic and rigorous evaluation of the school's performance and by completing school plans that have realistic and ambitious targets for future development – satisfactory.

External support

Education Walsall has provided a good level of support since January 2008. This includes the work of the school's link advisor, other advisory staff and a range of consultants from the learning and teaching team. They have worked effectively with the acting headteacher to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, provide staff with individual feedback, and set clear targets for improvement. The school's link advisor has also reviewed the support and training available to the school to ensure it has been better focused on the priorities identified in the school development plan. The school has also received a good level of support from the local network of diocese schools. Through this network, the class teachers at St Thomas of Canterbury have received support and training from teachers who have modelled and demonstrated effective practice. These combined actions have helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning and helped to accelerate the progress made by pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- Further accelerate the rate of progress pupils make in writing by increasing the opportunities pupils have to learn and apply their writing skills.