

14 March 2008

Mr P Cleary
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary and Nursery School
East Anglian Way
Gorleston
Great Yarmouth
Norfolk
NR31 6QY

Dear Mr Cleary,

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARY'S RC
PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Mr G Timms AI to your school on 27 and 28 February, 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 May 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - inadequate

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Tricia Pritchard
HM Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST MARY'S RC PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 27 and 28 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work and met with the senior management team, pupils, the vice chair of governors, the Diocesan Director of Schools and a representative from the Local Authority.

Context

There is ongoing instability of staffing in the Year 1 class where one of the part-time teachers is on maternity leave. In January 2008, a new temporary teacher replaced the teacher who taught the class in the autumn term. Arrangements for the summer term are not yet finalised. Staffing in other classes remains stable. The deputy headteacher has taken over temporarily the subject leadership for English.

Achievement and standards

At the school's last inspection in May 2007, standards and achievement in all subjects at Key Stage 1, and in writing at Key Stage 2, were identified as requiring significant improvement. These findings were substantiated in the 2007 national assessments. In the lessons observed on this monitoring visit, pupils' progress towards meeting the objectives of the lesson was broadly satisfactory. However, on examining pupils' work, it is evident that standards in Key Stage 1 remain below average and achievement, when compared to pupils' starting points, is inadequate. There has been a strong focus on raising standards in writing in Key Stage 2 with the result that standards, although still below average, are higher than at the last visit.

The school's records show that attainment on entry to the Nursery is in line with age-related expectations and children make good progress in the Nursery. However, this rate of progress is not maintained in the Reception class and Key Stage 1. Children's social skills, which improve well in the Nursery, do not continue to improve sufficiently in the Reception class. This is a factor in the continuing underachievement in Key Stage 1, since the present Year 1 pupils have not developed very effective working habits. The school's assessment data indicates that standards in Year 1 are well below average in all subjects. In Year 2, they are well below average in mathematics and writing, although standards in writing have improved satisfactorily since the start of the year. Pupils are making better progress in writing than previously. Standards are below average in reading.

In Key Stage 2, pupils' progress is erratic and is inadequate overall. Standards remain below average, although they are better in those classes where the teaching is more consistently effective. For example, in Year 4, current standards in reading and mathematics are now in line with those expected. In Year 6, although standards

are slightly below average in writing and mathematics, they are above average in reading. Standards in other classes remain below average and show little sign of improving while the provision remains so inconsistent.

In too many lessons, there is too little challenge for the more able pupils and this means they underachieve. Those with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress because they receive well-targeted support. Pupils from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language continue to achieve well and make better progress than the rest. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls.

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

- Raise standards in all subjects at KS1 – inadequate progress
- Raise standards in writing at KS2 – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain satisfactory. In the best lessons, pupils are attentive, interested and clearly enjoy school. Their personal, social and emotional development is given a very effective start in the Nursery. However, the teaching of good learning habits is uneven. In some lessons, there are high noise levels which impede learning. Pupils generally behave well around the school. Attendance remains below average. This is largely due to parents taking their children on holiday in school time and the school works hard to encourage full attendance. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe, including in their use of the Internet.

Quality of provision

During the monitoring visit, inspectors observed lessons and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work in every class. The quality of teaching in lessons ranged from inadequate to good with the majority judged as satisfactory. It was best in the Nursery, Year 4 and Year 6. In these classes, expectations were high, lessons had pace and teachers' subject knowledge was secure. Teaching assistants were well briefed and were confident in using the correct subject vocabulary. Inadequate teaching was observed when pupils spent too long on independent activities, which they did not fully understand, and which led to lapses in concentration. At present, there is too little good teaching to guarantee that all pupils will make expected progress in relation to their starting points. The quality of teaching is too variable throughout the school, with the result that pupils make faster progress in some classes than in others.

Pupils are now being assessed at the end of each term and a satisfactory start has been made in recording the outcomes. However, not all teachers are fully confident in using the data to inform the next steps in pupils' learning. This is particularly true in mathematics where teachers rely too heavily on a published scheme to dictate the structure and content of lessons. In Key Stage 1, teachers use too many photocopied worksheets instead of being selective. Higher attaining pupils are not being

challenged sufficiently. At Key Stage 2, there is insufficient differentiation between the mathematics work set for higher and middle attaining pupils. This was an issue at the last monitoring visit and it remains an area for development.

The teaching of writing during literacy lessons has improved and so has the quality of marking in most classes. Most teachers are providing pupils with better guidance on how to improve the quality of their writing. However, they provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to write independently in other curriculum areas. For example, in history, geography and science, far too many worksheets are used which lack challenge. Presentation of work is poor in some classes, especially where worksheets are stuck into books. This is contributing to pupils not taking enough pride in their work.

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

- Ensure teachers have an accurate view of how well pupils are doing so that they can set appropriately challenging work to accelerate their progress - inadequate progress
- Identify precisely what it is about pupils' writing which prevents them from reaching higher standards and take more appropriate steps to improve it – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

There is a lack of strong shared leadership to drive improvement. The headteacher has a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching through carrying out regular lesson observations. Teachers receive useful focused feedback. However, it has yet to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning in all classes where weaknesses have been identified. While lesson observations provide important evidence, there is scope for leaders to scrutinise pupils' work more regularly and thoroughly. This is necessary in order for them to gain an accurate view of the quality of teaching and of progression in learning, and to monitor curriculum coverage.

At the last monitoring visit, there were promising signs that the subject leader role had been strengthened. Since then, there have been changes in the composition of the senior management team. In addition to teaching Year 6, the deputy headteacher has taken on the subject leadership of English, as well as science, leads Key Stage 2 and has assumed the role of assessment coordinator. This is a heavy workload and insufficient time has been allocated for all roles. Further professional development is needed to help all leaders to gain a better understanding of their responsibilities and to increase their confidence in providing a firm lead. The management of special educational needs continues to be satisfactory.

With help from the local authority, the headteacher has developed more robust systems for tracking pupils' progress in order to inform target setting. Pupils at risk of underachieving are identified and targeted for extra support and all pupils attend interviews to discuss their targets. These are good initiatives. However, not all senior leaders have a fully secure understanding of the expected levels of attainment for

each year group and accuracy of teacher assessment was not explored in depth on this visit. Further evidence on the reliability of assessment and the impact of the new tracking system on classroom practice will be sought on the next visit.

The governors and improvement board meet regularly to monitor progress against the issues identified in the inspection report. The minutes indicate that members of both committees understand the issues that need to be addressed. Governors have attended training in line with personal priorities identified in a governors' audit and there is evidence that they are providing more challenge. The safeguarding issues have been addressed successfully and all staff have attended appropriate training. In contrast, there is still no clear policy for the selection of staff to fill temporary vacancies and this is contributing to instability in staffing, particularly in Year 1 at the present time.

There is room for further development in determining the strategic direction of the school. The school is very dependent upon the local authority and the outcomes of inspection to determine the improvement agenda. Self evaluation and development planning are not well established. A more analytical approach to self evaluation, based upon rigorous monitoring of standards, of teaching and learning and of the content and structure of the curriculum is needed in order for the school to demonstrate that it has the capacity to improve without external support.

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

- Ensure all requirements for safeguarding children are put in place immediately - satisfactory progress
- Improve the leadership and management at all levels so that together they develop more rigorous systems for checking how well the school is doing and identify the most important priorities for improvement and the most effective ways for bringing about change – inadequate progress

External support

The local authority is providing intensive support to assist the school to address areas of weakness. It is well targeted at raising standards and accelerating progress. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are restricting its effectiveness. Although the school development adviser's reports are well focused on providing useful advice, the school is a considerable way short of meeting its target of 70% of teaching to be good or better by April 2008. Local authority advisers and representatives make a valuable contribution to the governing body and improvement board, particularly in challenging school leaders to monitor more rigorously the progress being made against the key inspection issues.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards in mathematics throughout the school.
- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Provide leadership training.
- Review the quality and use of worksheets in all subjects.