

9 May 2008

Mr E Connolly  
The Acting Headteacher  
St Paul's CE Primary School  
Neville Road  
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Manchester  
M7 3PT

Dear Mr Connolly

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected St Paul's school on 8 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils and local authority officer that I met.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Following the inspection in November 2007 the substantive headteacher took long-term sickness leave and her post was filled by a consultant from the local authority support team. He has now taken up a permanent post elsewhere and you, a second acting headteacher, were appointed to St Paul's. At the time of this monitoring visit, you had been in post for five days.

As a result of the inspection on 7 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve achievement and raise standards in writing and mathematics in Years 3 to 6
- use assessment information more rigorously to plan the next steps in pupils' learning to ensure that they are appropriately challenged and make good progress.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

Since being made subject to a Notice to Improve, the school has received strong consultancy support and robust challenge from the local authority but its response to this has been mixed. The action plan for improvement is clear and includes two additional priorities to those identified at the inspection: improving the quality of teaching and developing the capacity of the school as a sustainable learning community.

There are now much firmer systems in place for tracking pupils' progress over time and ensuring that all aspects of the English and mathematics programmes of study are covered. These include a central school assessment timetable; regular pupil progress meetings; lesson observations; audits of provision; and scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning. The audits revealed that insufficient time was spent on teaching mathematics. Class timetables have been reorganised subsequently to ensure a daily one-hour lesson. Local authority officers and consultants identified that the teaching skill base was low and instigated a series of demonstration lessons and coaching sessions to support teachers. The acting headteacher also identified instances of poor behaviour on the part of a minority of pupils. He revised the whole-school approach to managing behaviour and this has been successful.

As a result of the actions taken, there is clear evidence that in some parts of the school standards are rising and pupils are making faster progress. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are writing at length and more often. The newly agreed presentation policy is having a positive impact in that pupils' work is better organised and the agreed method for teaching handwriting is now in force. The greatest progress is evident in Year 6, where the best teaching was observed. Here, a greater proportion of the writing in pupils' books is closer to the standard expected for this age group and pupils have a much clearer understanding of the key features of different types of writing. The new procedures for assessing pupils' writing are beginning to bear fruit as pupils become more aware of what they have to do to improve their work.

The picture is patchy, however. There has been more progress made in English than in mathematics because the school, rightly, prioritised English and, specifically, writing. The deputy headteacher has made a start in identifying key areas for improvement in mathematics but there is a lot to do in a short time. Lesson observations during this visit reveal that the quality of teaching in most of Key Stage 2, although satisfactory, is not good enough to raise standards and achievement quickly. Some teachers have not adapted their practice fully to the new requirements and have not recognised the urgency of the school's situation. In some classes, teachers' expectations of what their pupils are capable of achieving remain too low. There remain significant weaknesses in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in mathematics, particularly of place value and the school needs to look again at how this is taught across Key Stages 1 and 2. Additionally, now that pupils in Key Stage 2 are writing more, the extent of the gaps in their knowledge has become clear. Basic letter sounds knowledge, grammar and punctuation, aspects that should have been mastered in Key Stage 1, hinder pupils' progress while their understanding of writing styles and features grows.

Before the school's next full inspection, governors and the local authority need to consider the strength of the leadership team. The deputy headteacher is providing a good steer for mathematics but the leadership of English is weak and there is, currently, no substantive headteacher.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington  
Her Majesty's Inspector