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26th June 2008

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

Dear Mr George,

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

Following my visit with Declan McCarthy, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18th and 19th June, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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
H M Inspector

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

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 18th and 19th June 2008

Evidence

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

Context

An acting headteacher has been in post since the beginning of the summer term and one of the job share Year 1 teachers has returned from maternity leave. Staffing in the other classes remains unchanged from the last visit.

Achievement and standards

There has been a steady improvement in pupils' achievement since the last monitoring visit and standards are rising. Children in the Foundation Stage are making satisfactory progress in most areas of learning and with more stability in staffing, pupils in Year 1 are now making satisfactory progress in lessons.

In line with statutory requirements, Year 2 pupils have been assessed recently in reading, writing and mathematics. The results show that standards in reading are broadly average and, in writing and mathematics, they are slightly below average. Pupils have done well since they had a lot of ground to cover in a short space of time. They made good progress in reading and writing and satisfactory progress in mathematics in relation to their low starting points. The biggest improvement has been in reading, where results this year are close to the national average of 2007.

At the time of the monitoring visit, the results of the Year 6 statutory assessment tasks were not available. However, the latest teacher assessments show that Year 6 pupils have made good progress in reading and satisfactory progress in mathematics and writing. They indicate that standards are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' reading is much better than their writing and the school has rightly identified the need to continue raising achievement in writing in all classes.

Pupils in all classes make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. The school's tracking data also confirms that most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress overall. The exception is the more able pupils who do not always achieve as well as they could. Pupils at an early stage of learning English and those who find learning difficult make good progress because they receive good support for their learning. The school is setting more challenging targets and staff expect most pupils to have achieved these targets by the end of this academic year.

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

- Raise standards in all subjects at Key Stage 1 and in writing at Key Stage 2 - satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is good. They show respect for adults and for each other both in lessons and in the playground. In discussion, pupils said that they feel happy and safe in school and there was no bullying. They felt confident that if bullying ever occurred it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Pupils show initiative in helping others and those on the school council take their responsibilities seriously.

Quality of provision

During the monitoring visit, inspectors observed literacy and numeracy lessons in every class and scrutinised a sample of work in all curriculum subjects. All the teaching observed was at least satisfactory and there were good elements in several lessons. This improvement in teaching is having a positive impact on accelerating pupils' progress, particularly in reading and writing. However, there is still inconsistency in the quality of learning in classes where two teachers job share. Progression in learning is not always guaranteed during the changeover from one teacher to the next. This was evident when looking at pupils' written work.

Most teachers plan and teach better English lessons than mathematics lessons. This is because their English subject knowledge is more secure. Pupils' writing is improving because teachers are planning more opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes and audiences, and to reinforce their writing skills in other curriculum subjects, such as history, geography and science. They guide them effectively to improve the quality of their writing through more focused marking and through self assessing their work. Less worksheets are being used. However, presentation of pupils' work is an issue. Expectations regarding the crossing out of work and of neatness are not sufficiently made clear.

In mathematics, although there is evidence that pupils are making faster progress than previously, there is still an over-reliance on a published mathematics scheme to dictate the content and the pace of lessons. Teachers are sometimes too keen to cover the prescribed subject matter at the expense of checking that pupils fully understand their prior learning before proceeding to the next stage.

Teachers have a much better understanding of pupils' attainment than previously because they now assess their progress at key points every term. They are becoming increasingly confident in assessing pupils' work accurately and using the outcomes to target those at risk of underachieving, and to provide additional booster classes for these pupils. Not all are fully confident, however, at using the information to set tasks which are well matched to the different ability groups during lessons when all pupils are present. Sometimes middle and higher attaining pupils are set the same tasks or required to get too many answers right before moving on and this holds

them back. There is scope for reviewing how teachers plan the work of teaching assistants with middle and higher attaining pupils and also how they deploy them during the first half of lessons. A good example was seen in the Reception class during a mathematics lesson when teaching assistants intervened and worked collaboratively with the teacher to help pupils to understand how to count on. Lower attaining pupils are invariably set work which is well suited to their needs and they are supported effectively by teaching assistants.

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 – satisfactory 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

Leadership and management at all levels have improved. Under the leadership of the acting headteacher, subject leaders are playing a more active role in monitoring standards and in scrutinising pupils' work. The senior management team share a common vision to raise standards and improve provision. They are given time to fulfil their responsibilities and possess a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for development. Their reports to staff following the scrutiny of pupils' work present an honest and accurate appraisal of what the school needs to focus upon next. There is a need now to extend their roles further to include lesson observations and more rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching where areas for development have been identified.

With recent changes in leadership, there has been little time to engage in extensive self evaluation. The school's self evaluation document has not been updated since May 2007. However, all staff have a better understanding of their role in the school's ongoing development and they are working together as a team. Staff development assumes a high profile. The opportunities for staff to visit other schools to observe skilled practitioners is a good initiative and is having a positive impact on improving individual teachers' practice. A satisfactory start, too, has been made on drawing up curriculum action plans for English and mathematics although, in their present form, they lack well defined objectives and success criteria to facilitate the monitoring of tasks.

The leadership team recognises that a key priority is to increase the proportion of good teaching. There is scope for setting more precise and measurable targets to steer this development. A good feature is the well planned staging of initiatives to improve provision, starting with a focus on assessment and then moving to planning. On the next monitoring visit, inspectors will report more on the effectiveness of the school's self evaluation procedures under the new leadership arrangements.

Governors are planning ahead for the future leadership and governance of the school. Governors' clinics and newsletters have strengthened communication between parents, staff and governors. Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and being implemented. Pupils are well supervised in school and out of school.

The school is moving forward. This is exemplified by the improvements since the last monitoring visit, which are recorded in this report.

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

- Ensure all requirements for safeguarding children are put in place immediately – good 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 – satisfactory progress.

External support

The school has received extensive support from local authority literacy and numeracy consultants. This support has been well targeted at assisting staff with their planning and the assessment of pupils' progress and attainment. Subject leaders have benefited from their guidance on how to conduct a thorough scrutiny of pupils' work. However, there has not been enough focus on observing lessons. Advisers regularly monitor progress with the raising attainment plan and they have helped the school to set challenging targets for raising standards in English, mathematics and science. Although the school still needs the support of the local authority, it has become less reliant and this is a positive development.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increasing the proportion of good teaching in all subjects and especially in mathematics.