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8 July 2008

Mrs R Iannarilli
The Acting Headteacher
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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 Fran Ashworth, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 June 2008, 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 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 third monitoring inspection: 24 and 25 June 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, the numeracy coordinators, the chair and vice chair of governors, the school council and a representative from Education Walsall.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been a number of staffing changes. The Year 1 teacher, who is also responsible for the coordination of literacy in the school, has been absent through illness since March 2008. As a result, the other members of the school management team are sharing responsibility for this curriculum area. Following a period of absence, the Reception class teacher returned in April 2008. She has been deployed to teach the Year 1 class. Governors have recruited two experienced teachers; they will be joining the school in September 2008. One of these teachers has been given responsibility for leading and managing the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

The school's assessment information, evidence from lesson observations, and a scrutiny of pupils' books show that the majority of pupils are making at least satisfactory progress and some are making good progress. However, there are some variations in performance in reading, writing and mathematics and between classes. For example, the proportion of pupils making good progress is higher in mathematics than writing. With support from Education Walsall consultants, the school has reviewed its approach to the teaching of writing. A greater focus on grammar, including punctuation and sentence structure, has successfully reduced the proportion of pupils previously making little or no progress in this subject. Whilst pupils' overall achievement is gradually improving, almost half the pupils in each year group are still not making fast enough progress in writing. Children in the Nursery and Foundation Stage are continuing to make satisfactory progress in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

The school's most recent data shows that, although standards in mathematics remain below the national average, the gap between what the pupils are currently attaining and the levels they should be reaching for their age is beginning to narrow. The school recognises that standards in writing remain well below the national average and range from below to well below in reading.

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 are beginning to put forward ideas for improvements and organise projects within the school. For example, the school council successfully negotiated a discount towards developing the school playground. Attendance has continued to improve and recent figures are very close to the national average of 94.8%. Punctuality is also improving. Pupils say that they are keener to come to school because lessons are now much more practical and interesting. Staff are listening to pupils' concerns and following these up very quickly. As a result, behaviour is good and incidents of bullying have reduced. In lessons, pupils still become distracted when teachers talk for too long. Members of the parent teacher association are making a positive contribution in the school. They are working with pupils to organise fundraising activities and have recently set up a healthy tuck shop and an after school gardening club.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has strengthened since the last visit and there is more satisfactory teaching with good features. The school's monitoring information shows that there has been a slight increase in the number of good lessons. Evidence from pupils' books confirms that this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. However, the proportion of consistently good or better teaching remains too low. Consequently, the progress that pupils make is not as fast as it could be.

In the most effective lessons, teachers are using a wider range of strategies to actively involve pupils in their learning. These include opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning with a partner, ask and answer each others' questions, demonstrate and explain their ideas, and evaluate their own work. Nevertheless, this good practice is not yet consistent in all lessons throughout the school.

The school has continued to moderate assessment information and has a much better idea of pupils' current levels of attainment. As a result, planning has improved. It now clearly identifies the tasks for the different abilities of pupils. Evidence from lesson observations and books shows that pupils work now generally builds on previous learning. However, in some lessons, staff are still not sufficiently challenging the most able pupils. One pupil commented, 'This is my target, but I can already do it.'

Staff in the Foundation Stage have maintained their focus on refining systems for recording children's progress. They regularly observe children while they work and use this information well to inform future planning. There has been a lack of clarity about the most effective way to enhance provision in the Foundation Stage. The acting headteacher, the nursery teacher and the newly appointed Foundation Stage leader have recently met to review the curriculum and learning environment in the Foundation Stage. Their plans for improvement are appropriate.

Teachers' marking continues to give pupils suitable feedback. Marking is particularly good when teachers give specific examples that help pupils understand how to improve their next piece of work. During some lessons, pupils are given the chance

to read and respond to these comments. After each lesson, teachers identify the next step in learning. Occasionally, these 'next steps' place too much emphasis on presentation rather than strategies for correcting the errors in a piece of work.

The school has continued to develop the links between subjects by increasing the opportunities pupils have to develop their writing and basic literacy skills. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and achieve well when they are presented with exciting contexts for their writing. The youngest children, for example, have been given a real purpose for their writing. During the visit their 'postman' hand delivered postcards to the acting headteacher asking for her help with purchasing resources. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are continuing to extend their use of information and communication technology. Older pupils are now regularly searching the Internet for information, producing PowerPoint presentations, and some are making their own movies. Interactive whiteboards are yet to be used effectively by some staff.

Safeguarding procedures are all in place and staff are appropriately trained in all aspects of health and safety. The governing body will be ratifying the statutory policies during coming meetings.

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 headteacher continues to provide good leadership and leads with enthusiasm. In partnership with Education Walsall advisors and consultants and the chair of governors, she has accurately evaluated progress made since the last monitoring visit. They have used evidence from the analysis of pupil progress data and monitoring to evaluate the impact of initiatives and identify what more needs to be done to improve provision. This self-evaluation document is a positive development in the school and is helping to maintain the school's focus on accelerating pupils' progress. However, it has not yet had a significant impact on the school's most pressing priorities because the areas for development do not always clearly link to the key areas of weakness. For example, while it includes a useful analysis of the quality of teaching in the school, it does not clearly specify how relative weaknesses will be tackled to ensure teaching is consistently good or better.

Improvements have been made to the analysis of pupils' assessment data. The school is now able to identify the percentage of pupils who are working at, below or above the expected levels for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The acting headteacher is in the process of refining this analysis so that staff can monitor the progress of different groups of pupils. The school is also planning to set more challenging targets for pupils throughout the school.

The deputy headteacher and mathematics coordinator are now regularly monitoring the work of staff. They are reviewing teachers' planning and scrutinising pupils' work. They have also undertaken some joint lesson observations with the acting headteacher and staff from Education Walsall. Their feedback to staff has improved, but does not always give enough attention to teachers' classroom practice and its impact on pupils' progress. These two senior staff do not consistently record monitoring activities or their feedback to staff. The acting headteacher is aware that, although they are both developing their leadership and management skills, more remains to be done. Their evaluations continue to lack rigour because they do not focus enough on pupils' learning and the quality of teaching when evaluating the impact of their support.

The chair of governors has continued to meet regularly with the headteacher and provide her with a good level of support. Since the previous monitoring visit, governors have used assessment data and monitoring information to measure progress against the school improvement priorities. Some governors have also attended staff training sessions and reported their findings during full governing body meetings. Consequently, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities and are in a good position to support, challenge and encourage the senior management team.

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

The majority of Education Walsall staff have continued to provide the school with a good level of support. They have worked effectively with the acting headteacher and chair of governors to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. Effective support from the school's link advisor, other advisory staff and most of the consultants has helped staff to gain a clearer understanding of attainment and implement a greater range of strategies for involving pupils in their learning. However, the support has yet to improve significantly the quality of teaching and learning. Advice to the Foundation Stage staff has sometimes been inconsistent. An initiative to improve provision in the nursery has not been effectively monitored and Education Walsall staff with responsibility for this initiative have yet to fully evaluate its impact on children's learning. The school has continued to receive a good level of support and training from the Archdiocese and the local Catholic network of schools. Through this network, the school has been able to recruit two new teachers for September.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of consistently good and better teaching.