

18 November 2008

Mrs Jane Apolloni
Headteacher
St Thomas More RC Primary School
Erith Grove
Easterside
Middlesbrough
TS4 3QH

Dear Mrs Apolloni

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and chair of governors gave when I inspected your school on the 18 November 2008; for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you also pass on my particular thanks to the pupils I met throughout the day. They were a credit to themselves and the school.

Since the inspection of March 2008 there have been a number of changes within the school. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed following the resignation of the deputy headteacher in summer 2008. He is also the subject leader for numeracy. A special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) was appointed in September 2008 and also became the subject leader for literacy. Along with the headteacher, they comprise the senior management team. A newly qualified teacher also took up a post in September. The number of children on roll continues to decline, from 121 in 2007 to 113 in 2008; consequently year groups are often significantly smaller than the national average and some classes contain two year groups. The local authority has provided funding for an additional part-time teacher and this has enabled literacy and numeracy lessons to be taught in discrete year groups in Key Stage 2.

As a result of the inspection on 7 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards at Key Stage 2, particularly in English
- increase the speed and effectiveness of senior managers and subject leaders in taking action to improve areas of weakness
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 to ensure that rates of progress improve for pupils of all abilities.

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 the pupils' achievement.

Standards at Key Stage 2 have gone up. The school was particularly successful in raising standards in English and the unvalidated national test results for 2008 indicate that 95% of pupils attained Level 4 or above. There was less success in increasing the proportion of children attaining Level 5 or above but at 16%, this was much better than that reported in 2007. Mathematics results were disappointing and did not meet the school's challenging targets, mainly as a result of the legacy of poor progress in this subject by some pupils. Results at Key Stage 1 fell in 2008, from a significantly higher than average position in 2007. However results fluctuate from year-to-year because of the small number of children in each year group and their specific needs. For example, nearly 30% of this group of 17 children have special educational needs. School data indicate that results were broadly in line with national averages.

The school has fundamentally changed the approach to target setting and the collection and use of individual pupil data and targets and this is making a positive difference. Changes include a more consistent approach to planning, marking and assessment across the school and regular half termly assessment of pupils' progress. Alongside this, regular performance meetings with staff focusing on pupils who are underachieving, now ensure that information gathered can be used to provide targeted intervention and support to those who need it. Evidence from the school's tracking information and lesson observations, as well as lessons observed during the visit, indicates that many children are making at least satisfactory and often good progress in their learning. However, the school is aware that some pupils, especially those of higher ability, are not always challenged enough in lessons to achieve as well as they can. Action is being taken to improve matters.

The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 2 is improving. The senior leadership team and local authority officers monitor teaching and learning regularly. Evidence from their monitoring and this visit indicates that teaching is often good. Effective action is being taken where weaknesses occur. This includes supporting teachers in their planning, peer lesson observations and sharing good practice. Teachers are generally tailoring work better to match pupils' abilities and through effective use of individual targets, giving pupils a clear indication of how well they are doing and what they need to do to succeed in their learning. However, the school knows, there is still more to do to ensure work is always matched to the needs of all pupils. Whilst planning is differentiated effectively by 'must do, should do or could do' criteria, sometimes pupils spend too long at the beginning of lessons consolidating things they either already know or show they understand very quickly. Consequently these pupils do not have the opportunities to learn at a faster and more appropriate pace.

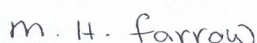
The new senior leadership team has increased the speed and effectiveness with which weaknesses are tackled. The head teacher and governors took decisive action to tackle the weak teaching and subject leadership identified in the last inspection. Senior leaders are working well together, with the support of the local authority, to move the school forward and make sure lessons learned from observations of

teaching and scrutiny of assessment and planning are integrated into the school's work to hasten improvement. Progress has been faster in the subject leadership of numeracy than literacy because the literacy coordinator was only appointed in September 2008. Whilst the numeracy coordinator is also new, this teacher already worked at the school and had instigated key improvement actions before the end of the summer term.

Since being made subject to a notice to improve, the school has received a range of help from the local authority; this has been particularly effective in supporting improvement in the subject leadership of numeracy, the funding of an additional teacher and the training opportunities provided for staff. The local authority's statement of action has been revised and improved. The accompanying action plan is also the interim school development plan and includes additional activities that link to the key issues identified for improvement. The school is aware that this plan needs to continue to evolve to take account of the improvements made and refocus on actions that need further work. The plan is reviewed regularly by the core action team which includes the chair of governors and two parent governor 'champions', senior leaders and local authority representatives. Governors carry out their role well and provide a continuing balance of challenge and support. The headteacher provides regular reports on the school's performance to the wider governing body but these are not always focused clearly enough on progress towards the key issues identified at the last inspection. For example, it is sometimes difficult to identify which elements of teaching have improved.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'm. H. farrow'.

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector