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11 December 2008

Mrs R Iannarilli
The Acting Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
Dartmouth Avenue
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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 Doris Bell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 Walsall Children's Services 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 9 December 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, the Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator (EYFS), numeracy coordinator, the chair of governors, the school council and a representative from Education Walsall.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been a number of staff changes. Two permanent and two temporary class teachers left at the end of the summer term. One of the permanent teachers was the literacy coordinator, who had been absent through illness since March 2008. Governors recruited three new permanent class teachers. They joined the school in September 2008. One of these new teachers is a member of the School Leadership Team (SLT) and has taken on the responsibility for leading and managing the EYFS and coordinating literacy in Key Stage 1. The headteacher is coordinating literacy in Key Stage 2. Two other teachers have changed classes and are teaching in an age group that is different from the one that they taught previously. Governors have successfully recruited a teacher to provide pupils with targeted support in reading throughout the school. Since the school became subject to special measures in June 2007, the majority of teachers who were in post have left. Only three out of the original eight class teachers remain.

Achievement and standards

The school's assessment information, which was moderated during the summer term, shows that, from a very low base, the majority of pupils made satisfactory progress and some were beginning to make good progress, particularly in mathematics and reading. However, the progress made by pupils during the summer term was not enough to catch up completely on lost ground. Achievement and the standards reached by learners during the last academic year were hampered by persistent weaknesses in teaching and the number of changes in class teachers. The 2008 Year 2 provisional teacher assessments reflected the well below standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, the unvalidated results of the Year 6 tests showed the proportions of pupils reaching the levels expected for their age in English, mathematics and science were well below average.

The school's latest assessment information, a scrutiny of pupils' books, and evidence from lesson observations paint a more positive picture. Progress is accelerating in most year groups and more pupils are making good progress than previously because of the continued focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills and the

introduction of a new approach to teaching sounds and letters during this term. The proportion of pupils making good progress since September has particularly increased in Years 2, 5 and 6, reflecting improvements in teaching. In the EYFS, the majority of children now make good progress. Standards are steadily rising, but due to the legacy of underachievement and relatively slower progress in some year groups, they remain below the national average and often well below, particularly in writing.

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' behaviour remains good. Pupils are polite, welcoming and keen to talk about their work. They are positive about the continued changes that are taking place in the school. They say that they are learning new skills in mathematics and are pleased that staff are giving them extra help with their reading. Members of the parent teacher association are working effectively with pupils to raise money for the school and a range of charities. The school has increased the opportunities pupils have to review and check progress towards their targets. This is giving pupils greater responsibility for their learning.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved and there is now more consistently good teaching in the school, and more satisfactory teaching with good features. An analysis of the school's assessment data and evidence from pupils' work confirm that, as a result of better teaching, pupils are doing particularly well in the EYFS and Years 2, 5 and 6. In other year groups the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and pupils are not always making the progress needed to close the gaps in their learning.

Pupils make good progress when teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that meet their different needs. They also do well when teachers and support staff spend time with different groups and individuals to reinforce, explain and help pupils understand new skills and concepts. The rate of progress slows when teachers leave pupils working on their own for too long and do not check how well they are doing. Consequently, errors are not picked up quickly enough to keep pupils learning moving forward at a sufficiently fast rate.

The quality of provision in the EYFS has improved considerably since the previous visit. With good support from the new Walsall Children's Services' communications language literacy development (CLLD) consultant, the EYFS staff have refined their classroom practice and made good improvements to the curriculum, lesson planning and the management and organisation of lessons. As a result, children make better progress than previously. There is good balance between adult led activities and

those children can choose for themselves. The staff in the EYFS are in the process of enhancing the classroom and outdoor environments.

Marking has improved. However, whilst all teachers now identify 'next steps' in their marking, these are not always related to what pupils need to do to improve. For instance, in a small number of classes and in some subjects they reflect what the teacher is going to teach in subsequent lessons.

The links between subjects, especially literacy and other subjects, are now more apparent. Teachers are also beginning to make more systematic links with numeracy and other aspects of pupils' learning. For example, in Year 2, pupils related the addition and subtraction of money to going shopping and spending their pocket money. This is helping to make learning more meaningful. Staff are now planning for the regular use of information and communication technology (ICT) in most lessons. For instance, pupils in all year groups are using computers to develop their story writing. Consequently, pupils throughout the school are learning new ICT skills and developing confidence with the use of computers. The use of interactive whiteboards remains underdeveloped.

As reported previously, safeguarding procedures are all in place.

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 – good
- 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, the school meets all statutory requirements.

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to lead the school with a strong determination to improve further the quality of teaching and learning in all year groups. Her evaluation of the school's performance is accurate. Following the previous monitoring visit and with good support from Walsall Children's Services advisors and consultants, she has reviewed and identified the actions that needed to be taken to tackle the school's key areas of weaknesses. The revised school improvement plan and the actions arising from it are realistic and already having a positive impact. For example, recent initiatives to improve the teaching of reading and writing have been successfully implemented and are contributing to faster rates of progress.

The members of the senior leadership team have further developed and refined the monitoring of teaching and learning. The impact of their work is particularly evident in numeracy and in the EYFS. The senior teachers' feedback to staff is more clearly

focused on raising pupils' achievement and improving the quality of teaching. However, not all of the senior teachers ensure that they prioritise the individual targets they set for staff, ensure the number of targets they set are manageable, or give staff the specific guidance they need to improve. Senior teachers evaluate the impact of their support but not all of the evaluations are rigorous and accurate. This is because they do not focus sufficiently on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching when making judgements about impact. As a result, some of the evaluations are too generous. The systems that senior teachers have developed for recording monitoring activities and evaluations are cumbersome. As a result of this visit, the acting headteacher is planning to monitor more frequently the work of the senior teachers in order to ensure a more consistent and rigorous approach to their work.

The chair of governors provides the headteacher with good support and keeps a close check on the school's performance. Some of the governors have continued to meet with subject leaders and report their findings to the full governing body. This is helping all governors to become more involved in holding the school to account for the standards reached by learners.

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

Walsall Children's Services staff have continued to provide a good level of support. The school's link advisor, other advisory staff and consultants have helped improve the quality of teaching in the school. The impact of their support is evident in the improved progress seen in most year groups. The new CLLD consultant has had a particularly positive impact on the quality of provision in the EYFS. The archdiocese has provided the school with effective financial support on capital issues and ways of developing the layout of the school for possible future improvements.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure all senior teachers give accurate and precise guidance to staff and that they focus on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching when making judgements about the impact of their work.