

5 February 2009

Mr R Morris  
Headteacher  
St Stephen's Roman Catholic Primary School  
Chappell Road  
Droylsden  
Manchester  
M43 7NA

Dear Mr Morris

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 February 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the governors and pupils on my behalf for their helpful contributions to the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 16 and 17 June 2008, the school was asked to do the following:

- Improve teaching and learning to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in reading and writing in Key Stage 1, and in science and mathematics in Key Stage 2.
- Ensure that all pupils have challenging targets and that their progress towards them is more closely tracked to identify underachievement and result in more appropriate teaching.
- Ensure that all pupils are fully aware of how they are performing and what they can do to improve their work.
- Improve the rigour of leadership and management in checking the performance of the school to swiftly bring about the necessary improvements in achievement and standards.

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.

Since the last inspection staffing has remained relatively stable. One member of staff has retired and a new teacher has been appointed. One teacher is currently on long term sick leave. The senior leadership team has been restructured in response to the issues raised at the time of the last inspection. This is resulting in a more rigorous focus on strategies for improvement. A slightly smaller senior team now consists of

the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, who has also taken on the leadership of English.

Overall, results of the national assessments and tests were higher in 2008 than in 2007. The standards reached in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 improved in 2008. However, they are still below the national average for seven-year-olds. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 increased in reading and mathematics, but is still well below that found nationally for pupils of this age. No pupil has reached the higher Level 3 in writing for the past three years. This indicates that the more able pupils in particular are not reaching their potential and standards overall remain too low. The work in pupils' exercise books and the school's own assessment data show that most pupils are now making satisfactory progress. This is mainly because teachers' assessments and the tracking of pupils' progress are more rigorous, marking is improving and there is a greater emphasis on teaching the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, all pupils now receive a daily 'letters and sounds' lesson which is resulting in improvements in their reading and writing skills. This work is also helping to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

In 2008, the school's own test results for 11-year-olds show that a significantly higher proportion of pupils reached the expected standards in English, mathematics and science. Two thirds of the pupils reached the higher Level 5 in science and more pupils than in 2007 reached the higher Level 5 in mathematics. The school has now identified the reasons for the steep fall in standards identified at the last inspection and taken action leading to recent improvements. Current progress, based on the school's assessment data and the work in pupils' exercise books, is satisfactory. An increasing proportion of pupils are on target to reach the nationally expected standards for 11-year-olds. The increased rigour with which senior leaders set targets, track and evaluate pupils' progress has enabled them to identify a relatively high proportion of pupils who are underachieving. Senior leaders are beginning to make more effective use of this information to inform their plans for school improvement. For example, the headteacher now holds regular meetings with each teacher to ensure that all staff agree how much progress individual pupils need to make each term in order to achieve their potential.

The quality of teaching is improving. A small proportion of the lessons observed were good. Where teaching is good, this is reflected in the better quality and quantity of pupils' work, marking which gives specific guidance and a faster than average rate of progress. Pupils are set tasks which ensure they are working at a level where they gain new knowledge and skills. Teachers explain what pupils are expected to achieve clearly and this is supported by good use of the interactive whiteboard. However, there is still too much variation in the quality of lessons, particularly in matching activities appropriately to the pupils' ability. Not all teaching takes good account of what pupils already know. For example, in science pupils draw mind maps to share their knowledge of the subject with the teacher, but teachers do not yet use this information effectively to design activities which provide a level of challenge appropriate to the pupils' abilities. In the weaker lessons too

much time is taken by the teacher talking and the pupils become restless and uninterested. The senior leadership team, with strong support from the local authority, has made good progress in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching. Their evaluations are increasingly accurate and they have plans of good quality, which include introducing peer-observations of lessons, to secure further improvement. Local authority consultant support to staff has been appropriate and sensitive to individual needs and, as a consequence, staff morale is high.

As at the time of the last inspection, the pupils' behaviour is good. They are keen to achieve well. Pupils who spoke to the inspector know their learning targets and the levels they have reached in mathematics, English and science to date. However, they say they are not always clear about the next steps in their learning and that marking does not always help them to know what they need to do to improve their work. The pupils are increasingly proud of their school and say their lessons are becoming more interesting.

A well designed programme to support school improvement is being implemented effectively by the local authority. This is providing strong support to the senior leadership team and is leading to an increased rigour and accuracy in the school's self-evaluation. The senior leadership team is now fully aware of the standards achieved across the school, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This increasingly secure knowledge is informing their higher expectations for pupils' achievement overall. Governors are supportive of the school. However, they do not yet receive all the information they need to be able to hold the school fully to account. The senior leadership team is tackling this issue. It has plans to ensure that governors are provided with information showing what proportion of pupils are on target to achieve their individual potential. This will enable the governors to measure the school's performance more accurately.

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

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector