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16 March 2009

Mr Richard Chipchase
Headteacher
St Paul's C of E Primary School
Heathside Grove
Walkden
Manchester
M28 3NZ

Dear Mr Chipchase

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST PAUL'S C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Gordon Alston, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2008. 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed with the agreement of the lead inspector.

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, the Diocese of Manchester and the Director of Children's Services for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: Monitoring Inspection of St Paul's C of E Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the headteacher, senior managers, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and commenced duties on 23 February with additional responsibilities as a class teacher for Year 3. One member of staff is on long-term absence. A school improvement committee of governors and a parents council forum have been recently established.

Achievement and standards

The school continues to take a range of appropriate steps to accelerate pupils' progress. Evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work indicates there are signs of better progress on the part of an increasing number of learners. In addition, the school's own assessment information shows that more pupils are making progress towards their targets in literacy and numeracy at the rate expected of them. For example, 77% of Year 6 pupils are on track to reach their targets in reading. More pupils across the school are making better progress in writing and pupils in Year 3 are beginning to catch up from gaps in their learning. This is because improvements in teaching and learning are increasing the progress pupils make in lessons. Pupils are more involved in their learning and are increasingly aware of their targets and how their work might be improved. Teachers are gaining confidence in judging the level of pupils' work. There are regular discussions of how well pupils are achieving. This has led to a marked improvement in the accuracy of how activities are matched to individual needs and in identifying those pupils who require extra support. As a consequence, support and intervention are planned more appropriately, staff have a clearer focus on the needs of individual learners and are increasingly confident in judging the progress pupils are making. Nevertheless, in contrast, standards for higher achieving pupils are proving more difficult to turn around and are not yet high enough. This is because the development of higher-order skills is variable and lacks precision in some classes. This means that some pupils do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards, particularly in literacy and the foundation subjects, to make sure that pupils make better progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The school promotes pupils' personal development and well-being well. Attitudes to learning have improved considerably following the previous monitoring visit. In lessons, more attention is being paid to providing excitement and challenge in activities, pupils are increasingly involved in their work, are more aware of what is expected of them and can sense that things are improving. Behaviour in the majority of lessons is much improved because learning is better matched to pupils' learning needs and interests. As a result, there is a purposeful working atmosphere in classrooms and most pupils are eager to learn.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. Inspectors' judgements are closely matched to those of the school's monitoring records which demonstrate that the number of lessons judged good or better is increasing. Good teaching was seen in all key stages.

In the best lessons, teachers capture pupils' interests well by planning a good range of interesting tasks and practical activities with opportunities for pupils to discuss and share their ideas with each other. A good example of this was seen in Year 2 when Samuel Pepys visited the class and read from his diary about the Fire of London. Pupils then wrote their version dressed in costumes using quills as pens. Elsewhere in Year 4, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement as pupils developed their understanding of a conscience dilemma using drama and role play. Teaching assistants are well briefed, show initiative to intervene appropriately and make an effective contribution to pupils' engagement and learning. Pupils behave well and show good attitudes to their work. They say that lessons have improved and they enjoy school much more because of this.

Where teaching is less strong, teachers' expectations of pupils are not as high as they could be, particularly for the more able learners. The pace and challenge in these lessons does not always result in good enough learning to accelerate pupils' progress. On occasions, pupils are not sufficiently prompted to think for themselves and show initiative. Opportunities that encourage higher attainers to think about how they learn or to think of different ways to tackle their work are not always taken. This is because pupils' work is sometimes over-directed resulting in limited opportunities for independent learning or for pupils to use their higher-order thinking skills.

Curriculum provision is being reviewed in order to develop pupils' creativity and to make learning more relevant to pupils' lives. Whole-staff training has focused on different learning styles resulting in more lessons where pupils are engaged in their learning. Subject planning is being adjusted to promote the development of key skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Better links between subjects have been identified. As a consequence, the learning experiences provided are more imaginative and interesting. The introduction of more practical work and investigations has been much enjoyed and appreciated by pupils. For example, in Year 4, pupils' knowledge of Vikings was enriched when a fully armed warrior visited their classroom. Elsewhere in Year 3, pupils were given the opportunity to produce a powerpoint presentation after studying The Tudors. These changes are very recent initiatives and it is too soon to measure the impact on pupils' progress. A curriculum action plan is in place which suitably outlines further developments for the summer term 2009.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it engages pupils better and increases their enjoyment of learning – good.
- Ensure that the curriculum is developed to provide greater breadth and balance and to meet the needs of all learners – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school is moving forward with a strong sense of commitment and a shared vision. Staff have continued to work diligently in addressing the school's weaknesses and in devising ways to improve further. Appropriate systems have been introduced to set targets for pupils and improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, in some areas a lack of quantifiable targets and milestones reduces the rigour with which the school can evaluate the impact of its provision.

The headteacher and new deputy headteacher have a clear common purpose that is well focused on accelerating the pace of change and increasing expectations of staff and pupils. They remain forthright in their desire to develop the confidence of staff by empowering them to make decisions and take even greater responsibility. As a result, teamwork is improving, staff are growing more confident in their roles and there is a positive approach to improvement across the school. Teachers are aware of their collective responsibilities, are increasingly accountable for their work and possess a clearer understanding of the school's position. This means that staff are working together and beginning to take greater responsibility for actions to support school improvement.

Leaders with responsibility for literacy and numeracy continue to develop their skills in judging the quality of pupils' work and in influencing the work of colleagues. However, senior leaders are aware that the role of subject coordinators is

underdeveloped in other subjects. Plans are in place to address this with training and support.

Governors are gaining confidence in their role as improvement partners and have stronger awareness of the school's strengths and priorities. The approach of forming a school improvement committee has ensured a greater focus to their work and a deeper understanding of how well the school is performing.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management at all levels to ensure that both provision and learning are at least good throughout the school – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to assist the school well, through the work of the school improvement officer. The work of the local authority consultants has provided valuable professional development for staff and leaders. Overall, time given to the school has reduced as the school's capacity to manage its own improvement has been strengthened.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for the more able pupils that encourage independent learning and the development of thinking skills.
- Ensure greater rigour in evaluating the impact of new initiatives.