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18 March 2009

Mr E McMorrow
The Headteacher
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School
Grange Road
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN3 2BD

Dear Mr McMorrow

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Gregory's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Peter Clifton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 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 March 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 the previous monitoring visit – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed to the school in all year groups

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 for Northamptonshire and the Chief Education Officer for the Catholic Diocese of Northampton.

Yours sincerely

Hazel Callaghan
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Gregory's Catholic Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, three members of the governing body, the deputy headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, and the mathematics and science coordinators. We also had discussions with pupils and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection a teacher in Year 5 has left and a newly qualified teacher has been appointed. Several management positions have been made within the staff to augment the senior management team.

Achievement and standards

Rates of progress are accelerating in all classes within Key Stage 2. This is closing the gap between the inadequate standards seen at the last inspection and the age related levels expected. Good rates of progress are evident in reading, writing and in mathematics which is resulting in standards rising, but they are not yet up to the levels representative of the abilities of pupils in the school, as shown by their attainment in Year 2. The best progress can be seen in pupils' writing because this has been a prime focus within the school. Boys' attainments were significantly below those expected, but these standards are now rising although they remain below that achieved by the girls. Standards in English in Year 6 are on track to be broadly average. Achievement is also improving in mathematics, but there are currently fewer pupils reaching the higher standards of Level 5.

At the previous visit standards and progress in science remained inadequate because the school had been focusing its efforts on improving pupils' learning in English and mathematics. Science is now being given a greater priority and, with good support from the local authority advisor, teachers are more confidently teaching science by focusing more on investigation and experimentation. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' knowledge and skills. This was well exemplified in an investigation observed in Year 6 where pupils were exploring which materials would be most successful in keeping bananas fresh. The greater emphasis on pupils' learning through developing the skills of asking the right questions and finding their own solutions is the beginning of more effective learning, but much still needs to be done if standards are to reach expected levels.

Concerns over the progress made by pupils in Years 3 and 4 have largely been addressed, but raising standards in science is now an issue for all classes. Children

continue to make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 as was observed in both the last inspection and the previous monitoring visit.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2008:

- raise achievement and standards in Key Stage 2, particularly in Years 3 and 4 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Strengths identified at the previous visit remain and some aspects have improved on those seen at the last inspection. Pupils enjoy coming to school, behave well and they know how to keep safe. Older pupils readily take on additional responsibilities to help around the school and their efforts help pupils get on well together, regardless of background. Many pupils are mature and comment thoughtfully about the school and what they would like to be changed. They say that they would welcome a stronger voice in the school community by being given more responsibility to run the school council for themselves and have a bigger role in shaping the school's future direction. While pupils often show a good awareness about healthy eating, there is still a minority of them who do not make healthy eating choices. Strengthening progress and improved skills as learners ensure pupils are now satisfactorily prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Lessons were observed in all classes in Key Stage 2, in some classes in Key Stage 1, and in the Nursery and Reception classes. The teaching observed was never less than satisfactory and many lessons were good. Outstanding elements in some lessons clearly show why pupils' progress is accelerating. Teaching throughout Key Stage 2 is more secure, but because of inconsistencies between subjects and between classes it remains satisfactory overall. In all lessons observed the teaching was well planned and appropriately structured so that new learning was introduced effectively. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and children want to do well. Activities were often well matched to the range of abilities within the class and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were well supported so they achieve the objectives set for their learning. Pupils learning English as an additional language are also well supported and staff exhibit a good understanding of the importance of introducing new vocabulary carefully so that pupils gain a good understanding. The more able pupils are usually given tasks that extend their learning effectively but there is still scope for more challenging activities in some lessons. In science, although teachers are more comfortable in teaching science, the subject knowledge of some is not sufficiently accurate and this inhibits pupils' good understanding.

The school has effective support and mentoring systems in place to support new and less experienced teachers and so the school is now free to appoint newly qualified teachers into any year group.

Since the last inspection, the school day has been extended and the school offers a balanced curriculum which meets statutory requirements. The curriculum is well adapted to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those new to learning English. Personal, social and health education plays an important part in the curriculum and is underpinned by the strong focus on developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are strengths in art, which is well displayed throughout the school, and pupils enjoy using information and communication technology to support their learning in other subjects. This was seen clearly demonstrated by children in the Reception class who sent emails from the class café to staff to find out what they wanted in their sandwiches. It was also evident in Year 6 as pupils were using digital cameras and research from the internet to produce a magazine about the school's science week. Although being given a much higher profile, the science curriculum remains a significant weakness. The development of pupils' investigative skills is not yet fully planned or systematically developed and not all staff have the subject knowledge to tackle some concepts which are not well understood by pupils.

Pastoral care continues to be good. Pupils feel that they are well looked after and all safeguarding procedures are in place. Good support is provided for those with particular needs or those who have English as an additional language. The school has forged good links with outside agencies and made effective additional arrangements to ensure the needs of these pupils are met. Improvement in academic guidance means that there is now a much more consistent use of assessment to inform pupils about what they need to do. This is better in writing than in mathematics and the school has identified the need to make pupils' targets in mathematics more easily understood. In a few lessons, pupils' personal targets are used exceptionally well and pupils gain good insights about how to improve by looking at each other's work. Marking is now typically good, although a few inconsistencies remain. It usually provides helpful comments about progress and sets further goals and there are many examples of a supportive dialogue between the teacher and pupil. Pupils' personal targets were used well by some teachers to help pupils understand the next steps in their learning. In several lessons pupils not only understood what they had to do but there was a real sense of aspiration for tackling the more advanced concepts so they would reach higher standards.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2008:

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that it is consistently good, to increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school – satisfactory
- review the timings of the school day and the curriculum so sufficient time is allocated to meet statutory requirements and the needs of all pupils – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

This is the aspect of the school's work that has improved the most since the previous monitoring visit. There are now clear procedures by which the school evaluates its work. Data from assessments are analysed carefully so that a clear view is gained of

each pupil's progress. The various groups of pupils represented in the school are tracked and the staff have a clear view of the relative progress made by boys and girls, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups and those learning English as an additional language. Pupils who continue to underachieve are identified and additional support is given. Evidence from various sources is gathered to ensure that analysis of the school's work is accurate, and staff are not afraid to acknowledge when something is not working so that more effective procedures are put into place. The newly extended senior leadership team plays an important part in this self-evaluation and analysis. The team is energetic and well focused. It reflects all parts of the school and there is now a much greater balance of views within this more distributed form of leadership. Discussions are open and decisions shared with all the staff. Monitoring of teaching and of pupils' learning is more systematically planned and there is a clear focus given to the scrutiny of pupils' work and of teachers' planning. Action plans reflect the results of these reviews and show a satisfactory focus on the next steps for improvement. The criteria by which these actions will be judged however are not yet sufficiently rigorous to be helpful in fully evaluating their impact.

Governors have also focused on how they can be more effective in evaluating the work of the school. With the support of the local authority, governors have developed a strategic plan that now guides their work. They have a much clearer view of how they can monitor the school's work. They are gaining a secure view of the strengths and weaknesses of school effectiveness, gained through the careful discussion of reports and by asking challenging questions.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2008:

- improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that whole school strategies are implemented fully and evaluated carefully to check their effectiveness – satisfactory

External support

The local authority continues to provide good levels of support for the school at many levels. There has been a quick response to the school's request for in-service training on science and advisors continue to effectively work with the headteacher and with governors. Recent training on new assessment materials is beginning to have a positive impact on teachers' understanding of pupils' standards and the next steps in their development.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop teachers' subject knowledge of science so teachers are confident and accurate in their teaching, and plan a systematic development of pupils' investigative skills so that standards in science improve.