

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Cecilia Lewis
The Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Cobden Road
Worthing
West Sussex
BN11 4BD

Dear Mrs Lewis

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

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 May 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 September 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

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 and the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services for West Sussex and Diocesan Director of Catholic Education for Arundel and Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector



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

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 May 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher and senior leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, consultant headteachers and a representative from the local authority.

Context

No significant changes have taken place since the previous monitoring visit. The governors are about to strengthen the senior management team through the appointment of a second assistant headteacher. Two main scale teachers are also to be appointed.

Achievement and standards

In 2008 standards reached at the end of Year 6 in the national tests were below average, although there was an improvement that reversed a downward trend established over the previous three years. Standards improved in all three core subjects and the improvement was most marked in English. Current information provided by the school indicates that standards continue to improve and that more pupils are on course to reach their target levels.

Progress is accelerating as a result of better teaching that is more closely focused on pupils' learning needs. This is helped by increasingly rigorous use of information on pupils' performance to track underachievement and highlight pupils who need extra support or provision. This has proved to be particularly successful with pupils who speak English as an additional language. These pupils receive good extra help that is improving their English skills.

In all lessons observed during the visit pupils were making at least satisfactory progress. Teachers are now more successful in planning for a range of different abilities in their classes and making sure there are activities that engage and interest all pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- analyse data more rigorously to track and improve pupils' progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to enjoy their time in this school and say they 'don't want to leave'. They are confident, approachable and feel very safe and well cared for by all the

adults in school. They find their teachers very helpful and comment that 'they make sure you learn'. Pupils really appreciate when teachers put in extra effort to make their lessons special. For example, older pupils were enthusiastic participants in a 'catch a criminal' activity that provided very good revision of writing and presentation techniques.

Behaviour is very good, both in classes and around the school. Pupils understand that rules such as 'no football in the playground' are meant for their safety during the building work on site.

The school council continues to make a good contribution to school life, although some pupils who are not involved in this feel a little left out. Overall, pupils are very willing to contribute to the school community and do so in a variety of ways, for example helping younger pupils who start school with very little spoken English.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is now more consistent throughout the school and good overall. Lesson planning has improved and more lessons, including those designed for revision purposes, are now stimulating and engaging. This is helped by higher expectations of pupils and what they are expected to achieve in lessons. There are still some differences in what is planned for lessons and what actually takes place in different classes. This can sometimes result in a difference in the quality of learning experiences. Teachers' skills are growing in using directed, differentiated questioning techniques to draw out pupils' thoughts and ideas and use these to develop the lesson.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) continues to improve as better use is made of new equipment such as interactive whiteboards. Both pupils and teachers alike are developing good skills in this area and are growing in confidence.

Teaching assistants provide valuable support to a wide range of pupils through their high quality work with different groups, especially those with particular needs. They are increasingly effective as teachers make better use of their time by planning carefully for their work with the pupils.

Pupils are now much more familiar with their work targets and what they have to do to improve. The introduction of the 'Stars and Wishes' strategy into marking practice is well liked by both teachers and pupils who feel it acknowledges success as well as indicating possible improvements. Pupils felt that this strategy 'helps us know how we can improve'. When used as intended, the strategy is very effective in giving pupils quality feedback on their work and is improving the quality of marking and feedback. As one pupil commented, 'I know my next steps.' There is some inconsistency in implementation, particularly in carrying out the 'wishes', where these are not followed up in later lessons or time given for pupils to address the issues raised.

The quality of writing continues to improve as different strategies are introduced. During this visit the oldest three classes in Key Stage 2 took part in a 'catch the criminal' persuasive writing activity that was very successful. It culminated in them all being involved in a courtroom scenario where some pupils confidently presented their arguments to all of the others.

The curriculum review and planning process are now well underway. Subject provision is being closely mapped to ensure both omissions and repetitions of content are eliminated. The impact of this work in lessons can be seen where day-to-day planning has improved along with the quality of teaching. There remain some differences between the intended curriculum and that actually delivered in the classroom.

The school continues to comply with the government requirements for safeguarding.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- sharpen teachers' planning to ensure that activities meet the needs of all learners more effectively and improve the quality of marking – satisfactory
- ensure the curriculum makes adequate provision for all subjects - satisfactory
- ensure that the school complies fully with government requirements for safeguarding – good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, supported by the senior management team, continues to move the school forward. There is a clear emphasis on honest and accurate monitoring and evaluation of the school's work to improve the quality of education. Leaders are making increasingly effective use of the outcomes of these processes to change and develop practice. This is raising the standards of teaching and learning in all areas of the school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage. This work is founded on good use of data to systematically address areas of weakness and build on areas of strength.

Initiatives just introduced at the time of the last visit, such as those related to the quality of marking, are now having an impact and are becoming embedded into everyday teaching strategies. Staff also have the flexibility to review and adjust plans and priorities as circumstances change.

The governors are very supportive and knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Relationships are constructive and governors provide a good level of professional challenge to hold the school to account.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- introduce robust systems, including a clear monitoring timetable, to check the impact of initiatives and other aspects of the school's work – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide good support and advice, particularly through the consultants and consultant headteachers. Senior staff have benefited from this support in areas such as reshaping the curriculum. The regular progress meetings are valuable in tracking improvements and adapting the support to meet future changing needs.