

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

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Mrs Lindsey Martin
Acting Headteacher
St Matthew's CofE Primary School
Westnewton
Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 3NT

Dear Mrs Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Matthew's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24-25 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2009. 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 be appointed with the approval of the monitoring HMI.

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 Carlisle diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely
Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St Matthew's CofE Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24-25 November 2009

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector investigated the school's work by observing twelve lessons, scrutinising documents and pupils' work and holding discussions with the acting headteacher, other members of staff, pupils, parents and the chair of governors. She also met with the National Leader of Education from the partnership support school and representatives from the local authority. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work in lessons and around the school were also observed.

Context

There have been significant changes to the leadership and management of the school and to teaching staff since the previous monitoring visit. A new acting headteacher and higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) from the partnership support school have been seconded to the school for two terms from September 2009. One part-time teacher has left and a temporary part-time newly qualified teacher has been appointed, with the approval of the monitoring inspector, to work alongside the acting headteacher and HLTA in Key Stage 2. She has also been employed to provide 1:1 tuition support for two pupils. A temporary member of staff has also been appointed to support a child with special educational needs and to provide booster classes for Key Stage 2 pupils.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Unvalidated Key Stage 2 results in 2009 show that the proportion of pupils who attained the government's expectation of Level 4 in English and mathematics, as predicted, was well below the national average. Although the amount of progress children made in their learning in English improved, it declined in mathematics and science. The legacy of underachievement and the low levels of pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy meant that pupils did not make the progress they should. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage made good progress from their starting points. Key Stage 1 assessments indicate that attainment remains well below the national average in reading and writing. Reading attainment was similar to that of 2008 but attainment in writing improved. Although mathematics attainment was well above the national average, pupils did not make the progress they should in achieving the higher levels in reading and writing.

The positive impact of the school's efforts to accelerate progress can be seen in pupils' work in lessons and in their books. Pupils are making more rapid gains in their learning and the school's more robust data indicate pupils should reach the standards they are capable of achieving in Key Stage 2 tests in summer 2010.

Teachers are beginning to tackle pupils' underperformance in writing throughout the school. Pupils are enthusiastic and want to write, but the presentation of pupils' work, handwriting and spelling still remain areas of weakness. A range of assessment procedures have been put in place and these are enabling teachers to identify pupils who are not making sufficient progress so that they can be targeted for extra help and support in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2. Pupils with special educational needs are now more accurately identified and appropriate provision is being made for them.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve pupils' progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards adults, each other and learning have improved considerably since the last monitoring visit. These improved attitudes were evident in the way pupils worked diligently and collaboratively in lessons. Pupils listen more carefully, take more pride in their work and increasingly respect the views and opinions of others. A 'can do' culture, based on mutual trust and respect has been established throughout the school. Very positive relationships exist between all of the adults and pupils. Pupils are more enthusiastic about school and more actively engaged in their own learning. Around school pupils are courteous, respectful and confident. Attendance levels remain high. There have been no pupil exclusions.

The effectiveness of provision

Initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning have begun to have a positive effect. Teachers plan well-structured lessons and there is an increased proportion of good teaching. In the most effective lessons a range of well planned activities with precise learning objectives and high teacher expectations result in a brisk pace and pupils' make good progress. Teachers constantly reinforce previous learning and pupils are clear what they must achieve and are challenged to do their best. As a result attainment is beginning to improve and the progress pupils make in their learning has accelerated. Adults are providing a good balance of challenge and support to pupils. They have worked hard to create a calm and attractive learning environment and to promote the development of positive attitudes to learning. As a result, pupils are more interested and enthused. They are actively engaged in collaborative tasks and beginning to become more independent in their own learning.

There has been a real drive to improve the quality of pupil tracking data. Teacher assessment skills have been developed with the help of local authority consultants.

More rigorous use has been made of assessing pupil performance descriptors and moderation activities. This has ensured teachers have established a secure baseline from which to measure pupils' performance accurately. This has been an important and necessary move forwards. Teachers and teaching assistants constantly check on pupils' learning to identify gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding and to ensure work is appropriately matched to meet their next step learning needs. Key Stage 2 pupils are provided with good support from an experienced HLTA. Pupils are regrouped to ensure the needs of the four different year groups in the Key Stage 2 class are effectively met. This includes the provision of targeted and challenging thinking skills work for pupils who are able, gifted and talented and good intervention support, for example, with phonics for those with particular learning needs. However, this is not yet consistent across all lessons and classes. Inconsistency is most evident in the quality of planning, marking and in guided reading. Insufficient attention is paid to planning for Early Years Foundation Stage provision to ensure that the two Reception children, taught in a class with Key Stage 1 pupils, have appropriate opportunities for child initiated and teacher directed play inside and out. Current planning fails to identify the role different adults play in supporting children's learning and development. Regular marking of pupils' work is undertaken and detailed feedback is provided, but this it is not yet consistently used to ensure pupils understand exactly what they have learned or to establish targets for future learning. Guided reading activities currently lack the rigour required to improve reading skills to the levels required by the end of Key Stage 1.

The curriculum is increasingly meeting the needs of individuals and groups of pupils and ensuring pupils gain a broader understanding of diversity in British society. A detailed community cohesion audit has been undertaken. More effective use is being made of visits out of school and visitors from the local community to strengthen the curriculum. An appropriate skills based curriculum has been developed across the foundation subjects in Key Stage 1. A more detailed review of the curriculum is planned for the spring term 2010. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of topical issues and a detailed understanding of a range of local and global issues. Assemblies are used well to allow pupils to reflect on similarities and differences and gain a greater appreciation of equality and diversity.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils are challenged, interested and make more rapid progress – satisfactory
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and broadens their understanding of diversity in British society – satisfactory
- Improve the use of target-setting, marking and tracking pupils' achievements so that pupils know the progress they are making and what they need to do next - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school has been strengthened since the previous inspection visit. The new acting headteacher has a very accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to secure the necessary improvements. She has not been afraid to make difficult decisions and to prioritise improvements. This is driving the agenda for school improvement at a brisker pace. There have been a number of notable successes. There is a strong, shared commitment amongst staff to improvement. The acting headteacher has worked very hard to establish effective teamwork and to change the culture of learning in the school. She has carefully monitored the school's raising attainment plan, skilfully prioritised issues that need action and drawn on available external support to make the necessary improvements. Monitoring of attainment and progress and the quality of teaching and learning has been given a higher priority. More targeted teaching of groups and individuals and the establishment of a secure baseline from which to measure pupils' progress have been important steps forward. The effective team teaching by the acting headteacher, HLTA and a new part-time teacher have created a consistent and stable staffing base in Key Stage 2. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly and pupils are making more rapid progress in their learning. Parents are very supportive of recent changes made in the school and the impact this has had on their children's attitudes and progress.

Improvements in governance have been maintained. Good support, provided by the local authority and the National Leader of Education, are helping to improve the governors understanding of issues that need to be addressed. Pairs of established and more recently appointed governors have begun to monitor the school's progress in relation to each of the areas for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management at all levels so the school has a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses and what it has to do to improve - satisfactory

External support

The local authority has continued to provide a range of appropriate staff development activities and to effectively support the school. The continued work of the literacy consultant has been much appreciated and the impact of her support is evident in improvements made to the literacy curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning and the more accurate assessment of pupils' abilities. This is leading to more rapid improvements in pupils' progress, particularly in speaking and listening. Regular and accurate reviews of the progress the school has made in relation to the areas for improvement have been made by the School Improvement Partner and a

number of local authority advisers. The National Leader of Education and support school partner have provided invaluable support and guidance to the school. This has included the secondment of the acting headteacher and a HLTA to the school for two terms and the support provided for the new part-time teacher in Key Stage 2. There is some anxiety amongst staff and governors about the long-term sustainability of the school and the need for a firm decision about the school's future. Local authority representatives indicated that arrangements for the future of the school are under discussion.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that appropriate planning is in place for the effective delivery of continuous provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.