

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 4234
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0300 123 4234
Ofstedhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk

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Mrs Gerida Montague
The Partnership Headteacher
Sinclair Primary and Nursery School
Sinclair Road
Lordshill
Southampton
SO16 8GF

Dear Mrs Montague

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sinclair Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 April 2010, 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 June 2009. 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 the Interim Executive Board and the Executive Director for Children's Services and Learning for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Sinclair Primary and Nursery School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 April 2010

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, including lessons, conducted joint lesson observations with the partnership headteacher and looked at samples of pupils' writing. The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on pupils' progress, and held meetings with the partnership headteacher, deputy headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, a member of the Interim Executive Board and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

The headteacher from Holy Family Catholic Primary School continues to act as partnership headteacher at the school. Senior staff and teachers from the partnership school also provide regular support. The teacher in the Nursery is seconded from the local authority and this has been extended for another year. One teacher remains on long-term sickness absence and another is on maternity leave. From September, two teachers from Holy Family are due to take up a one-year secondment to teach two of the classes. In addition, a new member of staff has been appointed to start from September. The local authority is consulting with the governors of Holy Family, the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Education for Portsmouth Diocese to secure long-term stability for the leadership of the school.

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

Learning seen in lessons was at least satisfactory during this monitoring inspection and no inadequate learning was observed. Pupils recognise that more is being expected of them and they feel that they are learning more successfully than they have in the past.

Science was not a focus on this monitoring inspection. Pupils' learning and progress in reading, writing and mathematics is continuing to pick up strongly. The school's assessment records show that all pupils have made some progress between September and March in these three areas. Within this picture, there are some clear strengths. For example, in Years 5 and 6, the majority of pupils made very good progress between January and March in writing; the same applies to mathematics in Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have made better progress than has been the case in the past. Their progress has been particularly good in reading in Years 1 and 2, writing in Years 5 and 6, and in mathematics in Years 3 to 6. This shows the school is providing more successfully for this group of pupils.



At the last visit, inspectors highlighted concerns about the inconsistencies and interruptions in learning for pupils in Year 3, owing to several changes of teacher. Since then, this class has had more stability in teaching as well as support from the local authority's teacher advisers, Holy Family staff and deputy headteacher. This has led to accelerated progress for the majority of Year 3 pupils. The pupils in this class are developing their ability to concentrate and keep to the task and they are beginning to be more independent as learners. However, there are also some who find it difficult to maintain their concentration and stick to their work especially when working without the support of an adult.

Various arrangements are in place to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments and leaders are confident that the tracking sheets and pupils' targets are based on secure information. In all years, pupils' achievement is accelerating and becoming increasingly consistent. This is because any pupils who are making slower progress are being identified and given extra support, by staff from Sinclair and/or Holy Family. During lessons, teachers or teaching assistants also work in depth with small groups with a specific learning focus. Good examples of this type of support were seen in both literacy and numeracy lessons during this monitoring visit.

The school is predicting much better standards at Year 2 this year, compared to recent years. At Year 6, some improvement is expected across the board but particularly in mathematics. It must not be forgotten, however, that for many pupils in Key Stage 2, there is a legacy of underachievement that led to the school being placed in special measures and standards remain lower than they should be, particularly in writing. Some pupils in each class, albeit a minority, have made satisfactory as opposed to good progress since September. In order to raise standards, they need to make accelerated progress and continue to close the gaps in their learning to give them the best chance of achieving their potential by Year 6.

The school has a structured programme for teaching phonics, which is starting to have some impact on pupils' writing, particularly lower down the school. There are some promising case studies where pupils have made rapid progress in developing the quality of their writing. Whilst older pupils are learning how to develop their ideas and organise their writing, many still have gaps in the more technical aspects of writing. Basic errors in punctuation, spelling and grammar are common in many pupils' work. This is because these aspects of writing have not been built up securely in the past.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and achievement in English, particularly writing, in mathematics and in science in Key Stage 2 – good.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school continues to emphasise the importance of attendance and a number of approaches are being used to encourage improved attendance, which are beginning to have some impact. The percentage of pupils with persistent absence has fallen this term, in comparison with last term, although it is still higher than it should be. Attendance levels are also showing some improvement but there is still further to go to bring attendance in line with other schools. The school has not had sufficient support from the local authority in relation to this area for improvement because visits from the local authority's education welfare officer have been too infrequent.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve rates of attendance and continue to emphasise to parents the negative impact that absence from school has on their child's progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

All teaching seen during the visit was satisfactory or good. The staff at Sinclair continue to speak highly of the support they receive from the staff at Holy Family and cite specific examples of where their practice has developed. Teachers are now drawing upon a wider range of approaches and there is greater variety in, for example, how teachers use time, resources, organise group work and target questions. There is some variability in how well teachers monitor the progress of different groups of pupils in the lesson, particularly pupils who are working independently. On occasions, these pupils were unable to make good progress because the work they were given was too hard, or they were unable to sustain their concentration and did not complete much work. The latter is more down to pupils not having had the opportunities to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning in the past. This aspect is improving, however. During this visit, in several lessons, pupils were asked to work in pairs or small groups and they responded well to these opportunities, especially when there was a time limit for them to complete the task. In a science lesson in Year 5, for example, pupils enjoyed working in groups on a problem-solving task where they had to discuss nine statements on cards and agree how they should be organised in order of priority. The pupils responded readily to this challenge and there was a clear sense of enjoyment. Since the last visit, the way that teaching assistants are deployed has been reviewed and reorganised. Their roles are developing well and they now have a stronger impact on pupils' learning at different stages of the lesson, including times when the whole class is gathered together as a whole group.

Marking is improving and, in the most effective cases, is closely aligned to the specific focus of the lesson, in mathematics and writing. Each pupil has writing targets in the front of their books to help them focus on specific things that they need to work on. However, in some classes, these are not used as routinely as in others and some have not been updated for several weeks. This makes them less useful as a means of improving pupils' standards and giving pupils responsibility for



their next steps in learning. Pupils are generally clear about what the main learning intentions are for individual lessons. They are less clear what they need to work on in a general sense to improve their standards in writing, mathematics or reading to get to the next level or sub-level.

The curriculum was not a focus on this particular visit.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that teachers across the school raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve, plan work to meet their differing needs and challenge them fully in lessons – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The partnership headteacher is communicating a strong sense of ambition and drive across the school. Morale continues to be high and teachers are benefiting from the modelling and coaching they receive from local authority teacher advisers and Holy Family staff. As a result, many pupils are catching up and some are making rapid progress. It takes time, however, for the improvements in pupils' progress to be realised in higher standards by Year 6.

The tracking system that had been established by the time of the first visit is becoming established and, as more assessments are entered onto the system, this is building up a fuller picture of each pupil's progress. It is used well by the partnership headteacher, deputy headteacher and teachers to monitor pupils' progress. The partnership headteacher conducts regular meetings with each teacher to focus on every pupil's learning in their class and identify any adjustments or extra support that is required, such as one-to-one tuition or booster groups. As yet, the impact of these initiatives on pupils' learning and progress has not been evaluated to establish where interventions and approaches have been most and least effective.

The joint observations carried out during the visit showed a generally accurate match between the inspector's judgements and those of the partnership headteacher. While the analysis of data is used well to ensure a good focus on individual pupils' learning, activities such as lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work do not have the same rigour. Leaders' records of observations tend to describe what is happening in the lesson rather than evaluate the impact of the teaching. Written reports veer more towards broad, general comments on all pupils' learning, such as 'pupils made good progress' rather than drilling down into the parts of the lesson where different groups, or individuals, made stronger or weaker progress than others. They include many helpful, practical suggestions for teachers, however, which they appreciate. This is a good feature of the observations.

The school's improvement plan is providing a clear steer for the school's continuing improvement. The partnership headteacher ensures that progress is reviewed regularly with actions modified as necessary. The leadership role of the deputy



headteacher is developing well with an increasing involvement in monitoring teachers' planning, sampling pupils' work and observing lessons. Other teachers with leadership responsibilities are also beginning to develop their roles by, for example, sampling teachers' planning and reviewing the provision in their respective subjects.

The members of the Interim Executive Board are very experienced in governance and some have a strong background in education. Minutes of meetings are more explicit about the progress the school has made in relation to the required areas for improvement because these are now standing items on each agenda. Members ask challenging questions of the school's leaders and scrutinise the available evidence, particularly the data on pupils' progress. They are holding the school to account and playing a key role in the improvement of the school.

The partnership headteacher and staff have made good progress so far in relation to the areas for improvement that were explored on this monitoring inspection. However, it must be recognised that the school is still at a relatively early stage in its 'journey of improvement' and continues to require outside help. There is still considerable reliance upon the partnership headteacher, Holy Family staff, local authority teacher advisers and an Interim Executive Board. This is not unusual for the second monitoring visit, out of a possible five, but it means that the school still has some way to go in developing and sustaining its capacity to improve. The two members of staff who are on leave have not been observed by inspectors since the school went into special measures and there are further staff changes planned from September. It will be important for the many improvements seen to date to be built upon, sustained and embedded so that pupils' outcomes continue to improve.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership and management so that all leaders understand fully both the urgency with which standards and achievement need to be raised and their roles in bringing about improvements – good.

External support

The local authority has provided good support, which has continued to be tailored to the school's needs. Reports from the local authority visits have been sent to the school more promptly. The School Improvement Partner and senior inspector continue to work closely with the partnership headteacher to ensure support is targeted where it is most needed. The School Improvement Partner's report, completed since the last monitoring inspection, includes detailed and helpful analysis whilst also ensuring appropriate challenge for the school. The work of the teacher advisers has been a factor in the improvements in pupils' progress this term in Year 3. The local authority's support for improving attendance has not been as effective and has had limited impact.

