

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 with Robin Thelwell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 February 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first 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 – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in the Early Years Foundation Stage only.

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 first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 February 2009

Evidence

Inspectors 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

Just before the inspection the acting headteacher took up the post permanently. Since the inspection a member of staff has been appointed to the senior leadership team as an assistant headteacher. There have been no other changes in the teaching staff. The governing body has filled two vacancies and is now at full strength. Additional governors have been provided by the local authority and the diocesan education board. The Early Years Foundation Stage, judged to be good overall at the inspection, was not inspected on this visit.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached in national tests at the end of Year 6 rose slightly in 2008. Although remaining below both local and national averages, this represented an improvement in standards over those reached in the previous year. In mathematics standards were unchanged and did not improve. Standards in English improved overall, although attainment in boys' writing was particularly low. The numbers of pupils reaching the higher levels in English and mathematics were below average in all areas except for reading. Standards at the end of Year 2 in 2008 were also below average. The school's most recent analysis of information collected on current pupil performance indicates that standards are set to improve and progress is now satisfactory.

Pupils' progress is improving because the school is making much better use of information on pupils' performance to track performance, identify underachievement, and highlight individuals who are in need of more support. Additional input from the local authority consultants is helping the school to make better use of data to support improving teaching and learning.

In the lessons observed during the visit, pupils were largely making satisfactory progress. It was better where teaching was tightly focused on pupils' learning with a strong emphasis on developing literacy skills. Progress was much slower where teaching did not recognise and make provision for different learning needs. While most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are now making satisfactory progress, those who are more able do not always achieve as well as

they could. This is because lessons are often not challenging enough and planning does not always meet their needs.

Progress since the last inspection:

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

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are proud of their school and the part they play in helping it to improve. They behave very well both in lessons and around the school. They value their teachers and find them 'fair and helpful'. They approach their lessons with obvious enjoyment and appreciate lessons that are engaging and interesting. This includes assemblies where they are confident to speak out in front of the entire school and participate in the strong spiritual aspects of school life. However, where lessons are slow and not well planned, pupils rapidly become bored and distracted. Some pupils comment that they find the work too easy at times.

Pupils say they feel safe in the school and have plenty of friends. As one pupil commented, 'We are just like a large family.' The pupils are particularly proud of their recently established school council and the impact this has on the school. They feel they are listened to and their opinions are appreciated by their teachers.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains inconsistent across the school, although it is now satisfactory overall. This represents an improvement since the inspection and a satisfactory start has been made in addressing weaknesses. Teachers are now beginning to develop a shared understanding of how their teaching can bring about effective learning. Where teaching is good, pupils make the best of every opportunity and are enthusiastic participants in their learning. However, this does not happen often enough to stimulate and improve achievement.

Lesson planning remains inadequate as it does not yet focus clearly on strategies that will deliver the knowledge and skills teachers expect pupils to have gained by the end of the lesson. Teachers are not always clear about exactly what they want pupils to learn or provide the right opportunities, tasks or questions to meet learning objectives. Pupils are right to say they sometimes find the work too easy as teachers do not consistently challenge pupils, particularly the more able, to do their best. As a consequence, the quality, extent and pace of learning are reduced.

Where teachers are skilled in using good, effective questioning, together with use of talk partners, this helps pupils clarify their thinking and consider their responses. Teachers are starting to make good use of recently installed information and communication technology (ICT) resources, especially interactive whiteboards, to provide a visual stimulus to learning. Teaching assistants make a valuable

contribution to pupils' learning, although their time is not always used to full advantage in the whole-class initial introductions to lessons.

Strategies used in lessons to find out what pupils know and can do and to monitor performance are still at an early stage of development and are not used well enough to help plan future learning. Most pupils know and value having targets for their next stage of learning. However, while teachers have a good rapport with pupils and give good oral feedback in class, the quality of marking remains inconsistent. Despite examples of good practice in some classes, marking does not always give pupils enough guidance on how to improve their work.

The school is currently completing a review of the curriculum and provision is improving. More time has been allocated to teaching mathematics and science, but it is too early for this and other strategies to support the teaching of basic skills to have made a significant impact on pupil performance. However, the ongoing focus given to improving the quality of writing, particularly that of boys, is evident in many good examples of extended writing on display. There is still a difference between the planned curriculum and that actually received by the pupils, especially where introductions to lessons are too long. This cuts the time available for active learning and reduces the challenge, especially for more able pupils.

Immediately after the last inspection, the school started to rectify the inadequacies identified in meeting the current legal requirements relating to the safeguarding of learners. This was tackled with the utmost urgency and requirements are now met in full. Procedures for child protection and all aspects of health and safety are secure.

Progress since the last inspection:

- sharpen teachers' planning to ensure that activities meet the needs of all learners more effectively and improve the quality of marking – inadequate
- 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 is creating a teaching team that is much more tightly focused on delivering a quality education where each pupil is achieving the best they can. The senior leadership team have made good progress in moving the school forward through planning for improvement that addresses the issues. Some initiatives have had to be developed from scratch and have required a peeling back of layers of inadequate practice to allow for a clear way forward to be developed. This has taken time and the new strategies have not yet fully embedded in the working practices of every teacher. As a first step, the headteacher has been successful in convincing staff of the value of the monitoring and evaluation systems that she has introduced. These systems are robust, tightly scheduled, and aimed at identifying successful practice and the impact on pupil achievement. There is still some way to go in using

the outcomes of the monitoring processes to change and develop practice and set rigorous targets for improvement.

The governors make a valued contribution to the process of change through their effective roles as critical friends who challenge the school to do its best. They are effective in planning and tracking their own impact on the school.

Progress since the last inspection:

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

External support

The local authority is providing a high level of support and advice. The headteacher benefits from working with the consultant headteachers, particularly in improving the analysis and use of information on pupil performance. Regular progress meetings take place between the school and the local authority. These are effective in tracking improvement and allowing for support to be tailored flexibly to the changing needs of the school. The statements in the action plan produced by the local authority are effective in helping the school to improve.