

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 0845 123 6002
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** sarah.cartlidge@tribalgroup.com

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Mr Dominic Whyte
The Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Lewis Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL51 0HZ

Dear Mr Whyte

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Jeremy Spencer HMI, to your school on 23 and 24 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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 not 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 Governing Body, the Directors of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and the Diocese of Clifton.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010

- Meet all requirements for ensuring children's safety with immediate effect by:
 - ensuring all necessary checks on staff are carried out and recorded
 - ensuring all required training in safeguarding is up to date
 - keeping complete records of the case histories of pupils at risk of harm
 - ensuring the governing body monitors procedures and practice more closely.
- Ensure the school's leaders have an accurate view of the school's provision and performance by:
 - tracking the progress of pupils accurately
 - analysing the information gained from such tracking in order to identify variations in the progress of the different groups
 - comparing the results of such analysis with other methods of evaluating teaching, to build a complete picture of its quality
 - monitoring the impact of the recent changes to the curriculum.
- Use the results of the analyses above to draw up detailed plans for improvement that identify what area is in need of improvement, how it is to be improved, and what impact is expected on pupils' progress as a result.
- Improve the quality of teaching from satisfactory to at least good and raise achievement by:
 - ensuring more-able pupils are always given suitably challenging work
 - enabling lower-attaining pupils to work more effectively
 - ensuring swift action is taken by the school's leaders to rectify any inadequacies in provision.

Special measures: monitoring of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and lessons in all years, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the associate headteacher, the School Improvement Partner, senior leaders, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, representatives from the local authority and groups of pupils.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the headteacher has returned full time to the school and is supported one day a week by the associate headteacher who had been the acting headteacher at the time of the previous visit. During the inspection Year 5 and Year 6 pupils visited the local church on the Thursday.

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

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make good progress, due to good provision. Teaching activities are well planned to meet individual needs and pupils demonstrate confidence when working independently. Both the indoor and outdoor learning environments are imaginatively organised to provide a broad range of stimulating activities. Children relate well to each other, make good progress from very low starting points and enjoy learning. The systems in place to assess children are well organised. However, the teachers' assessment of children's progress is sometimes too generous. This means that assessment data at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage can be over-inflated and inaccurate.

The school now has secure assessments of pupils and is able to identify areas where progress is good, for example in writing, satisfactory as in reading, and poor in mathematics. While it has identified that progress in mathematics is weak, the school has not yet identified why and then quickly put in place appropriate actions to rectify this problem.

Progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved and observations of lessons show that pupils make satisfactory progress. The engagement of lower attaining pupils and those not being directly supervised in lessons is better. Pupils take more responsibility for their own work. Although, at times, these pupils finish their tasks and do not always have additional work to challenge them.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' personal development and well-being continue to be good. Behaviour around the school is good, with pupils being polite to visitors and getting on well with each

other. They are considerate when playing together at breaks. While engagement in lessons has improved, there are still times when pupils are compliant learners rather than active participants. When teaching is more engaging and exciting, for example when pupils are working on their themes, pupils are far more motivated and enjoy their work.

Attendance has improved since the time of the last visit and in the last half term has been broadly average. At the moment there are no pupils identified as being persistently absent and having too much time off school. This demonstrates the good work of the pastoral support worker who has been working effectively with parents and carers of children who have a lot of time off school.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. In the best lessons, pupils are fully engaged in learning because teachers assess their prior learning effectively and plan work to meet their needs. The level of challenge in these lessons is appropriate and there are opportunities for pupils to work independently, which they are doing with increasing confidence. Teachers plan appropriate lesson objectives, which incorporate clear success criteria to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. However, these features are not yet fully embedded in all lessons. Marking has improved and books contain some good comments and advice on how to improve. However time is not systematically made for pupils to respond to these comments and to bring about the intended improvements.

A new thematic curriculum has recently been introduced and the pupils have responded well to this. Lessons now focus more effectively upon the progressive development of pupils' skills. The new curriculum facilitates the development of pupils' literacy skills well. However, opportunities for pupils to apply and develop mathematical skills through the different themes are not identified and hence relevant opportunities are missed. Learning environments are stimulating and the standard of displays has improved significantly. Pupils spoke fondly about the 'space' and 'under the sea' themed classrooms which give a stimulating and engaging impression and atmosphere.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The work of associate headteacher has been very effective in supporting the re-integration of the substantive headteacher and in developing the curriculum, including collaboration with staff from his school. The substantive headteacher is now back in control of the school and has been getting up to date with the changes which have been made in his absence. He, along with the senior team, has identified areas which need improvements, for example mathematics. But, as yet, a plan of action is not in place to identify the specifics of why pupils do not make sufficient

progress and put in place actions to overcome the problems. Actions are not sufficiently timely, partly because of the time needed for the re-integration and partly because senior staff are not given enough responsibility to work on specific areas of concern. The school now needs to demonstrate it has the capacity to be fully autonomous and to take ownership of developments. These then need to be embedded in order to bring about sustained improvement.

Members of the governing body have a good understanding of what needs to be done and hold staff to account. They have matched up governors to school years to ensure greater understanding of what is happening in school. They challenge as well as support the management of the school. They have formulated a clear action plan to continue improvements and this contains clear success criteria. Governors are continuing to work with the local authority to finalise an agreement to manage the deficit budget over a three-year period.

Performance management procedures have been introduced and all staff have negotiated suitable targets for both their classes and, where appropriate, their leadership roles. Senior staff now monitor the work of others through classroom and lesson observations and planning and book scrutinies. Safeguarding procedures are secure and the headteacher has updated his training since returning to school.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- meet all requirements for ensuring children's safety – good
- ensuring the school's leaders have an accurate view of the school's provision and performance – satisfactory
- use the results of the school's self-evaluation to draw up detailed plans for improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. It provides a sound framework for further improvement, including suitable support for the leadership of the school, subject expertise and for governors. The local authority recognises the need to audit the assessments at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure the assessments are accurate and has allocated time to support the school with this task. The School Improvement Partner and associate headteacher work directly with the headteacher and governors to ensure that they have a good understanding of what is required to continue the improvements within the school in a timely manner. The local authority coordinates support well and evaluates its impact to ensure actions bring about the necessary improvements through its frequent project board meetings.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the rate of progress and raise standards in mathematics by:

- working with the local authority to audit the provision of mathematics to identify why pupils make slower progress in the subject and areas which may be blockages to pupils' further development
 - speedily formalising and implementing a plan to overcome the areas identified above
 - evaluating the actions to ascertain their impact
 - integrating mathematical ideas and concepts into the themes within the curriculum so that pupils are able use and apply their mathematics in real life situations.
- Increase the rate of improvement by utilising the strengths of all staff with leadership roles and giving them greater responsibility for specific areas of improvement.