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16 November 2005

Mr M Carter
Headteacher
Our Lady Star of the Sea RC Primary School
Thorpe Road
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Dear Mr Carter

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Joan Lock AI to your school on 14 -15 November 2005, 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior management team, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school continues to have unavoidable staff absences. The headteacher was absent during the previous inspection in May 2005 and has now returned to work. The deputy headteacher is on long term sick leave. An additional teacher has been

appointed since the inspection to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the single age classes in Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

When children start school into the reception class, their attainment is below that normally expected for their age, as many have very limited speaking skills. Standards in Year 2 are average in reading and above average in writing and mathematics. The 2005 results of the national teacher assessments in Year 2 remained broadly the same in reading and writing compared to the previous year's results, but showed a good improvement in mathematics due to the effective support from the LA and actions by the subject leader. Standards in Year 6 were generally above average in the 2005 national tests. The results in Year 6 showed a marked improvement on the previous year's results, especially in mathematics where 50% of the pupils attained the higher Level 5. Pupils met the targets set by the school in English and were very close to meeting them in mathematics.

Progress in the reception class is outstanding, as a result of dynamic teaching and excellent working relationships between staff. Progress is satisfactory overall throughout the rest of the school with good progress in Years 2 and 6; a reflection of the good teaching and learning in these classes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- raise standards in literacy and numeracy – good progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good, as they were during the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy school. Their good attitudes to learning contribute well to the progress they make in lessons. Attendance is satisfactory. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good; cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils are encouraged through personal, health and social education and religious education to be safety conscious and are taught how to keep safe. For example, pupils receive visits from the fire service and the police and learn about drug awareness and sexual health when appropriate. Pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle and participate in a good amount of physical education. They show compassion for the plight of others and raise money for CAFOD and the Tsunami Appeal. The school takes note of what the pupils say through an effective school council, so the pupils feel their contributions are valued. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility. This is effectively demonstrated in the 'buddy' and the pupil 'mediator' systems, which provide good opportunities to develop team working and persuasion skills.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall in Key Stages 1 and 2; it is outstanding in the Foundation Stage. There is good teaching in Years 2 and 6. Consistent

features of good teaching included well matched activities to meet the needs of the different ages in the same class, the consistent and effective use of whiteboard technology, and sharing and reviewing what had been learned. Lessons are well planned. An inspirational teaching assistant, supporting teaching in the Foundation Stage, enriches the children's learning exceptionally well. In some classes, pupils were over-directed and given very little responsibility, work did not always meet the needs of the wide range of abilities and learning intentions were not always shared or displayed prominently for pupils. In those lessons, pupils were sometimes not clear what they were expected to do. The curriculum is inclusive and teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The curriculum is interesting and appropriate and is well planned so pupils learn in an organised way. It is enriched by a suitable variety of speakers and visits.

Assessment procedures have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. A recently introduced assessment tracking system provides information on progress term by term in reading, writing and mathematics. All pupils have copies of targets in writing and mathematics in their exercise books to help them know how to improve. In several classes, pupils are involved in self assessing their understanding through the 'thumbs up' system. Older pupils know how to use their targets and find them helpful when they mark each others' work. Each classroom has bold displays of targets in English and mathematics for different groups of pupils. However, very little reference is made to these by teachers.

Good behaviour is very effectively encouraged by a behaviour policy with clear rules and a system of rewards and sanctions that are well understood and consistently applied. Care and support for vulnerable pupils are good. The headteacher and the staff know the children well and place their well being as a high priority. Health and safety routines and risk assessments are in place. Child protection procedures are clear; there has been recent training so these are well understood by all staff.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- complete the work on developing tracking and target setting systems and use the information effectively to improve the achievement of all pupils, including the more able - satisfactory progress
- give pupils the information they need to be able to evaluate and improve their work – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new ideas and support provided for the headteacher by the Primary Leadership Programme, and more recently by the local authority, are having a positive impact on improving leadership throughout the school. The senior management team has two additional members who are effectively supporting improvements to literacy and numeracy. Systems to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning are in place following training for the

headteacher and senior managers. There has been rigorous evaluation and feedback to teachers, although improvements in some classes are less apparent. A lot has been achieved in a short time. The action plan is on track to achieve its success criteria. School development planning and the completion of the school evaluation form are in the early stages. The school has the capacity to continue the improvements made so far this term.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- establish rigorous and thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures for all of the school's work – satisfactory progress

External support

The local authority has provided extensive and worthwhile support, particularly in literacy, numeracy and in improving leadership and management. As a result, there is a range of efficient systems in place to enable a close check to be kept on the school's work and pupils' learning. The local authority's action plan is good and includes clear measurable success criteria. The impact of additional support provided to the school is good. The school had been a cause for concern for some time and many actions to improve the school were already beginning to have an impact before the inspection. The absence of senior staff subsequently hindered progress but this is now resolved.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to monitor and support teaching in those classes where pupils are only making satisfactory progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese for Hexham and Newcastle and the Director of Education for Durham.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Rodger
Additional Inspector