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Mrs Jacquie Bartley
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Dear Mrs Bartley

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with George Rayner Additional Inspector to your school on 16 and 17 January 2006, 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 June 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 including lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior managers, the chair of governors, groups of pupils, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The headteacher retired in the summer and an acting headteacher is in post for this academic year.

Achievement and standards

The school's analysis indicates that standards in English at the end of Year 6, although still below average, are likely to be higher than in 2005. Work seen in lessons, and in pupils' books, supports this judgement. Standards in mathematics and science in Year 6, and in all three core subjects in Year 2, are less likely to rise this year.

The school has improved its procedures for tracking the performance of pupils, identifying those in danger of underachieving, and providing additional support to prevent this. Pupils in Year 6 spoke confidently of what they needed to do to improve their written work in English, but were less aware of how to improve in mathematics. The school has ordered resources that are intended to be used to raise standards in reading, and in speaking and listening, and has trained staff in their use. It has also taken steps to improve standards in mathematics, but these are proving slower to take root.

Pupils made satisfactory progress in lessons. They are keen to learn and willing to contribute actively to lessons. Pupils at an early stage of learning English made good progress during the lessons where specialist support was available, but the tasks that were set for them on other occasions sometimes lacked challenge. Pupils with learning difficulties made satisfactory progress. In-class support assistants contributed effectively to this.

Opportunities for pupils to apply their English, mathematics and ICT skills in other subjects have improved. In a geography lesson, Year 6 pupils applied and developed their number and graph skills when comparing the month-by-month temperatures in two mountain ranges (the Alps and the Andes), and on two mountains (Ben Nevis and Everest). Several of the pupils were born in South America, and so this work including the Andes was particularly interesting to the class.

The school has taken satisfactory steps to raise standards in the Foundation Stage. With the support of the local authority, well planned schemes are being used to improve pupils' writing, and their recognition of words. The children are making better progress in using small tools. New outdoor facilities, which are close to completion, are intended to enhance children's physical development. The school has shown that the targets formerly set for children were unrealistic, given their very low standards on entry, and these have been revised to provide more effective opportunities for children to build upon their successes.

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science and in other subjects where they are below average – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance, which was unsatisfactory, has risen to the national average. The school has improved its procedures for checking up on unexplained absences and has introduced motivating rewards for good attendance.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are polite and considerate to each other and adults. They are courteous and friendly to visitors, and initiate conversations with them. In these they speak positively about the school. They like to work and often show enjoyment in learning, for example, when they become very enthusiastic about contributing ideas to discussions. While pupils usually act responsibly, some do not work as effectively as they might when they are not directly supervised.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be good. A recently reintroduced School Council has improved opportunities for pupils to work together in improving their school, and in understanding the democratic process.

Provision for pupils' future economic wellbeing and opportunities to contribute to the community are good. Year 4 pupils take part in a youth enterprise activity. The school often raises money for charities.

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

- Restore levels of attendance to their previously very good levels and strengthen procedures to monitor attendance – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There was some good teaching, and a smaller proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. All the lessons began with a statement of what pupils were intended to learn, explained in language that pupils were likely to understand, and concluded with some evaluation of whether these learning intentions had been achieved. Teachers explain instructions and content clearly, and relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Teaching assistants and other adults contribute effectively to learning in the classroom. Lessons are planned thoroughly, but supply teachers do not always have access to the resources and information that they need to teach effectively. The pupils still have too few opportunities to learn through working in a group, or through problem solving. The better lessons were demanding, interesting and presented pupils – as individuals - with ever-increasing motivating challenges as their learning progressed. Teachers encouraged pupils to develop autonomy and confidence as learners through, for example, supporting individuals as they worked out for themselves how to spell easier words.

The less satisfactory lessons lacked pace and challenge and were dull. Teachers were less effective at ensuring all the pupils were, or remained, engaged and on task.

The school has mapped its curriculum for all subjects. The timetables for all classes include all appropriate subjects, and the differences in the curriculum being followed by classes in the same year group have been reduced. The over-long lessons that were previously found in Key Stage 1 have been eliminated and the time given to geography, history and design and technology in Key Stage 2 classes has been

increased. The school is making good use of its new ICT suite and computers that are available in other areas of the school. The school's extra-curricular provision has increased and some new clubs are planned to start shortly.

Marking has been addressed through staff training, and teachers now spend more time marking work alongside pupils. Some teachers write comments in pupils' books that could help them to improve their work, but this practice is not widespread.

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

- Establish a curriculum overview and ensure enough teaching time and attention are given to all subjects in every class, particularly for pupils of the same age in different classes – satisfactory progress
- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils have a better understanding of how to improve the quality of their work – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher made a prompt and thorough assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what it needed to do to improve. Action that has already secured substantial improvement in learning and ethos, and that has the capacity to re-establish the school as effective, was set in train immediately, although there is still a long way to go. The staff have responded well to the strong and positive lead provided by the acting headteacher. They are committed to the school and to their profession, and are working together effectively to build the school into a community that is confident and caring, and that meets pupils' educational and social needs effectively.

The school's staffing has been stabilised sufficiently to meet its immediate needs, and further key appointments are due to be made shortly.

The school's improvement plan is clear, thorough and sets out what needs to be done and who will lead each development. Its organisation shows a sense of urgency, and reflects the sense of purpose with which this school plans to secure further improvement. It is a living document that the staff refer to frequently.

The governance of the school has improved. There are no vacancies on the governing body, committees have been formed, training has begun, and a climate in which governors feel confident to challenge the acting headteacher, and to act as critical friend, is being established.

The statutory issues raised by inspectors have all been addressed. All the staff have been CRB checked, and trained in child protection. Senior managers have been trained in risk assessment, particularly relating to school journeys. The school's electrical equipment has been tested for safety, and the school buildings were evacuated within 90 seconds during a fire drill in December. Performance management and half-termly staff reviews have been introduced, and contracts and job descriptions are presently being prepared for all staff. The governors are ready

to produce, in due course, an annual report to parents that includes all the required information.

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

- As a matter of urgency, strengthen leadership at all levels and improve management procedures to monitor and evaluate effectively the quality of provision, standards and achievement – good progress
- and to meet statutory requirements:
 - Make sure that all statutory requirements with regard to health and safety, particularly those relating to child protection, are fully met.
 - Fully implement performance management procedures for all teachers.
 - Ensure that the governors' annual report to parents and the school prospectus contain all the required items – good progress.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. The school has welcomed the high quality support that has been made available through the local authority, EAZ and diocese, and has utilised it to enhance its progress.

Main Judgements

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Wandsworth and the Roman Catholic Diocese for Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mills
Additional Inspector