



23 April 2007

Mrs L Fitzpatrick
Headteacher
Great Marsden St John's CE Primary School
Trent Road
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Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Fitzpatrick

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GREAT MARSDEN ST JOHN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jennie Platt, Additional Inspector to your school on 19 and 20 April 2007, 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 November 2006.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, members of staff, a representative from the local authority and an adviser from the diocese who is also a recently appointed governor. Fourteen lessons or parts of lessons were observed, together with an assembly and registration periods.

Context

The school has had a significant number of long-term absences during the spring term of 2007. This included a member of the senior leadership team and the subject leaders for all core subjects. These absences have affected the continuity of learning in some classes and have unsettled the pupils. Two members of staff continue to be absent.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards are well below average, but there is variation between year groups. Results in the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2006 declined in reading, writing and mathematics, but remained broadly in line with the national average. Monitoring data suggest that there will be a slight decline in these standards in 2007. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 overall standards declined; however the results in English showed an improvement and were in line with the national average. The standards in mathematics and science were exceptionally low in comparison to the national averages. The school's monitoring data suggest that results in 2007 will improve significantly in mathematics and those in English will be maintained.

Achievement is unsatisfactory. The progress that pupils make, as measured by the contextual value added, fell steadily from 2004 to an exceptionally low level in 2006. The school's analysis of progress shows that there is significant underachievement and that progress is inconsistent between year groups.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Raise standards and increase pupils' progress, especially in mathematics and science – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

The strengths identified in the previous inspection report have been sustained. Throughout the school pupils are polite and helpful to visitors and eager to share their experiences. The majority enjoy school, attend regularly, and play happily together at break and lunchtimes. Most pupils behave well and are friendly towards others. However, some pupils become restless in some lessons and their inattention distracts others. This is often the case when work lacks challenge and teaching fails to inspire pupils. Many pupils do not take sufficient care over the presentation of their work.

Quality of provision

Although the school has sought advice and put in place several initiatives to improve teaching, there has been limited impact because of staff absence. Good and satisfactory teaching was seen but too much remains inadequate. Most teachers establish good relationships so that the pupils are willing learners and there is usually a good show of hands in response to questions. In some lessons teachers do not include sufficient variety of approach to

stimulate learning and the pace is often too slow. Assessment information is not used well enough when planning lessons and too often work does not meet the full range of pupils' needs. Although pupils are grouped according to their ability for literacy and numeracy, tasks within lessons are not always sufficiently challenging and the more able pupils especially could achieve more. Systems are not well established to ensure continuity of learning between classes. For example, there is no clear strategy to teach problem-solving in mathematics. As a result, pupils in Year 5 lack confidence in applying their numeracy skills and discussing their methods of calculation. Teachers have made a good start at sharing with pupils the expected outcome for the lessons. This usually makes it clear to pupils what tasks they are to complete and enables lessons to run smoothly. However, it is not always apparent what it is the pupils are to learn and this makes it difficult to assess pupils' learning at the end of lessons. The marking of pupils' work continues to be a weakness, with limited evidence of comments that help pupils to improve their work.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and includes a coherent programme of personal development and citizenship. The inclusion of Spanish and a range of visitors further enrich the curriculum. Better use is being made of the exterior play area to enrich learning within the Foundation Stage. The purpose of additional time allocated to English on the timetable is not sufficiently clear and therefore it is not used well. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.

Procedures to ensure pupils' safety are in place. Checks to ensure people working with pupils are suitable meet current government guidance. Pastoral support is good and pupils say they feel safe and know staff are there if they require help. Some improvements have been made to the system to track pupils' progress in mathematics, enabling staff to identify underachievement and provide additional support. This is not yet the case in English and science and the school is uncertain about overall progress in these subjects. The school is not making enough use of assessment information to set targets for pupils and pupils are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all learners are appropriately challenged through tasks which allow them to build systematically on previous learning. – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher is working hard to bring about improvement and is well supported by the deputy headteacher. There is a clear action plan to address

the issues outlined in the previous inspection report and there are good systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the plan. There are challenging timescales for completing the plan.

The headteacher carried out an intensive programme of lesson observation during the spring term and has a clear awareness of the strengths and areas for development in teaching. A system for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils has been introduced and a partial analysis of standards and progress across the year groups in the school has recently been completed. This has given the headteacher an understanding of the extent of underachievement, particularly in mathematics, but data are not available for all subject areas or year groups. A detailed analysis to identify the weakest areas of learning in each subject has not been completed. The self-evaluation of the school is not sufficiently concise, accurate or analytical. The headteacher has recognised this and intends to review the document. The role of subject leaders is underdeveloped, largely because of the long-term absence of some key staff. The developments that have been undertaken provide a sound foundation for further improvement.

The governing body of the school is supportive and has commenced training to develop the skills to hold the leadership of the school to account for its outcomes. However, this aspect of its role is currently underdeveloped and it has only recently reviewed the role of its committees.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Monitor the school's performance more accurately and critically, using the findings to improve self-evaluation and raise standards.
 - inadequate progress

External support

The local authority's action is beginning to improve provision within the school, but this has been limited by the instability in staffing. Support from the link adviser, the monitoring and intervention team adviser and advisory teachers is now laying a sound foundation for future improvements. The diocese has wisely strengthened its presence on the governing body through the appointment of one of its advisory staff as a governor. Work has started on improving the committee structure. Training on the analysis of data has been initiated and there are plans for further training.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- With the local authority, act urgently to stabilise the staffing within the school.
- Extend tracking of pupils' progress to include all core subjects and to identify areas for improvement

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education at Blackburn Diocese and the Director of Education and Cultural Services at Lancashire County Council. The letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Garry Jones
H M Inspector