

Nord Anglia Inspections
Anglia House
Carrs Road
Cheadle
Stockport
SK8 2LA

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 491 4191
Direct F 0161 491 4409



16 November 2007

Mrs E Jackson
Headteacher
St Patrick's Catholic Primary School
Todholes Road
Cleator Moor
Cumbria
CA25 5DG

Dear Mrs Jackson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST PATRICK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Mary Sewell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 November 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 May 2007. 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 only be appointed with the agreement of the lead inspector.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese of Lancaster and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST PATRICK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 14-15 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior managers, groups of pupils, a member of the governing body and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection has resigned. An executive headteacher from a neighbouring school was appointed in February 2007 to work with the school for the summer term. A new headteacher was appointed with effect from 1st September 2007.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' current work, as well as the school's assessment data and the test results from 2007, suggests that more pupils are making better progress than previously and that standards are beginning to rise. Results from the tests this year show that for the first time in five years, standards are above the national average in all core subjects at age eleven. A notable success was that in science over 90% of pupils attained Level 4, the standard expected for their age, and an above-average number achieved the higher Level 5. This is because the school has successfully introduced several strategies to improve pupils' achievement, which in turn are leading to improvements in classroom practice. The planning of lessons is more focused on what pupils will learn. Opportunities to plan activities for pupils of different abilities are much clearer. The use of success criteria is improving pupils' understanding. Tracking systems to identify pupils who are underachieving are now in place. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make each year. Teachers are gaining in confidence in judging the level of pupils' work. There is a better understanding of what pupils can do and what they need to learn next, although this is inconsistent in some classes. In addition, the school's focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning has raised the expectations of teachers and pupils. As a result, the legacy of underachievement is being tackled more effectively and senior leaders have a clearer focus of how well the school is performing.

Nevertheless, standards for the higher achieving pupils in writing and mathematics are not high enough. This is because the level of challenge in some lessons is too low. This results in some pupils not achieving as well or as rapidly as they should.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2007:

- Raise standards in writing, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development is good and supports their learning well. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel part of a safe and secure community. They always try their best and are keen to succeed. They work hard and concentrate well in lessons. Even when activities are less engaging, they show positive attitudes to their work and behave well. Their attendance is satisfactory. Provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. As a result, pupils are thoughtful and caring and get on well with each other. They have a strong sense of fairness about what is right and wrong and are increasingly confident about making choices and decisions. Pupils say that their teachers look after them well and are confident that adults will lend a listening ear. This is because staff are caring and vigilant, relationships are strong and pupils are well supported when they are distressed or unhappy.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. The lessons observed were at least satisfactory and some of them were good; none was inadequate. Nevertheless, there is still too much teaching which is not consistently good enough to eliminate the legacy of underachievement.

A significant factor in improving the quality of teaching has been the increasing effectiveness of classroom monitoring. The strengths of individual teachers have been more appropriately deployed since September. As a result, teachers are more confident and self-assured. Staff have had the opportunity to observe the best practice in other schools. As a consequence, teachers are increasingly reflective and forward-thinking.

There has been a big improvement in the understanding of what children need to learn rather than what teachers have to teach. The school has correctly focused on reviewing its planning, which now ensures continuity and progression in learning. The new lesson plans are helping teachers organise learning in individual lessons and the purpose of the lesson is now understood by pupils. This careful and detailed planning has proved secure enough to overcome some of the weaknesses in teaching and was a key reason why the teaching seen during the visit showed improvement.

In the best lessons, pupils enjoy and understand their learning. This is because expectations are high, the pace of learning is rapid and outcomes are clear. This in turn enables pupils to be well organised and ensures that there is a smooth transition from the teachers' introductions to the lessons to group work. A good example of this was seen in a Year 6 lesson on interpreting pie-charts; the lower attaining pupils were well supported by teaching assistants and as a result made good progress. In the stronger lessons pupils are confident, assured and are able to articulate their learning in groups or with their 'response partner'.

In some of the less successful lessons, activities are too directed, the range of teaching styles is too narrow and there are too few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and work independently.

Systems for marking pupils' work are improving. Pupils are provided with additional time to improve their efforts following appropriate guidance from staff. As a result, pupils are clearer about how well they have done and have an increasing awareness about how they can improve further.

Although, teachers display improved confidence in planning activities, the use of assessments to set and review targets for individual pupils is inconsistently applied and does not always inform pupils' learning. This means that there is a variation in the challenge for pupils, particularly for the highest attainers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2007:

- Improve the quality of teaching, and in particular ensure assessment information is used to plan learning which challenges all pupils – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of marking so pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The new headteacher is leading the school very well and has an accurate view of the school's priorities and the reasons for its past deficiencies. Since her appointment, she has provided strong and purposeful leadership and has gained the support and confidence of staff and governors. She has accelerated the pace of change, redeployed staff and taken significant steps to prioritise actions and eliminate inadequate teaching. A thorough analysis of the current provision has presented her with an accurate view of where the school can improve. The outcomes of this evaluation have been used well to implement a rapid improvement plan that identifies clearly the actions required to achieve key objectives and sustain progress.

Staff and governors are putting the concerns of the past behind them and are keen to move forward to get the school back on track. Individually and as a team, they are more confident about their work, have a better understanding of what is expected from them and are more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, morale is much improved with collective hard work, and staff are open and receptive to new ideas. For example, the leadership team has taken every opportunity to benefit from the advice and support from LA's consultants, who are currently working with staff on a programme of intensified support, aimed at raising standards in English and mathematics.

The school has made satisfactory progress in the way that it monitors and evaluates its performance. Systems for checking on the quality of teaching are leading to improvements in classroom practice. Procedures for target-setting are beginning to emerge, using improved data. As a result, senior leaders are more focused on raising

achievement and have a clearer view of how well pupils are learning, although this is not yet consistently understood by all staff.

Governors continue to deepen their knowledge of the school's performance through regular and timely reports. They are very committed and are becoming increasingly confident in their role as improvement partners by asking questions and seeking advice.

After a period of dramatic lows and much disruption following the previous inspection, the school's barometer is set to rise. The leadership team is not complacent and under no illusions about the task that lies ahead. They remain forthright in their desire to see all pupils at St Patrick's achieving their potential and are determined to see the school improve further. Whilst taking pride in recent improvements and overcoming the first hurdle, they recognise that much further work is still required.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2007:

- Ensure leaders and managers effectively monitor all aspects of the school and particularly the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory
- Make planning for school improvement more rigorous, particularly in setting challenging learning targets for all classes – satisfactory

External support

The LA is providing an appropriate level of support to the school, coordinated well by the school improvement officer. The LA's statement of action matches the school's improvement plan and includes elements of both support and challenge for all areas of improvement. Ongoing work through the Intensifying Support Programme, despite some initial set backs, is proving effective in building the confidence of staff and raising achievement of pupils further. The LA is committed to maintaining high levels of support for the school to improve the capacity of staff at all levels to enable them to monitor the quality of provision and use the outcomes of this to inform strategies for improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards for higher achieving pupils in writing and mathematics.
- Extend the range of teaching styles to stimulate pupils' greater involvement in learning.
- Improve further systems for setting and reviewing pupils' targets to inform planning.