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Mrs T Murphy
Headteacher
Holy Trinity CE VA Primary School
Brockley Avenue
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE34 0TS

Dear Mrs Murphy

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Holy Trinity C of E VA Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 30 and 31 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2008.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with pupils, staff, the school improvement partner (SIP) and representatives from the governing body, the diocese and the local authority (LA).

Context

This letter is part of the monitoring procedures required by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) during the first two years of the existence of any establishment given a 'Fresh Start'.

Holy Trinity Primary School was formed from two predecessor schools, St Mary's CE VA Primary School and All Saints CE VC Primary School. Both schools were previously in Ofsted categories of concern. The school is located on the All Saints site. It is being extensively refurbished and the work is expected to be completed by September 2009. The headteacher, four teachers and five teaching assistants were employed in the predecessor schools. The school is smaller than most primary schools and most pupils are of White British heritage. The school is situated in an



area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very high. A high proportion of pupils is identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities and although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is low, the school caters for some pupils with significant needs. The school has strong links with the parish church, the deanery and the diocese. The school has recently achieved the Activemark.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are below average. When children start school in Nursery most can do less than is typically expected for their age. There are particular weaknesses in communication, language and literacy and in children's personal development and social skills. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit. The coordinator has a thorough understanding of their starting points and she has developed useful assessment systems which help all staff plan the next steps in children's learning. Children benefit from exciting activities which are carefully tailored to their needs and there is a good balance of teacher directed and child initiated activities. This helps children to become independent and gives them the skills needed to work with a partner or small group. Key workers have good relationships with the children in their care and the careful organisation of activities means that children will speak confidently to any adult in the room and use the large space very effectively. Staff provide good guidance and support and this helps children gain a secure understanding of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The very effective care they receive helps children to enjoy learning and they happily show off their new skills to staff or visitors.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2 although their progress accelerates in Years 5 and 6. The school is tackling a significant legacy of underachievement and the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are weak. The school carried out detailed assessments of all pupils at the start of the autumn term. The outcomes of this assessment show that the majority of pupils were underachieving and that most pupils were working at levels well below those usually expected for their age. Most pupils have not developed a fluent, joined script and many form letters incorrectly. Many pupils struggle to use all but the most basic level of punctuation and some do not have instant recall of tables or number bonds. Reading skills are weak and some pupils do not have sufficient phonic knowledge to help them to read unfamiliar words.

The school has implemented an effective system to track pupils' progress. Pupils are assessed at the end of each half term and the data collected is entered onto the child's tracking sheet. Class teachers assess their pupils. The senior team are aware that some outcomes may be a little too generous because teachers' skills are developing, but in the longer term this is helping teachers to develop a thorough understanding of pupils' progress and is making them accountable for any underachievement. This process is already proving to be effective. Teachers are focused on ensuring that all pupils achieve well and they are acquiring a secure understanding of pupils' attainment. The school has been using a variety of



commercial test materials but staff have identified that the outcomes of some tests are too positive when compared to pupils' work over the longer term. The senior team have acted on this information and are currently reviewing assessment materials and processes. Evidence from the inspection confirms the school's view that pupils are not yet progressing well enough to eradicate a legacy of underachievement and that the attainment of a high proportion of pupils is below that expected for their age and ability. However, work seen in pupils' books and in lessons indicates that the school is 'closing the gap' between actual and expected attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils from two different schools have come together amicably and have learned to live and learn alongside each other. They feel part of the new school and are very appreciative of the changes that have taken place. They particularly value the attention to detail evident in the new building and they are very pleased with the new furniture and resources. Behaviour is good. The school has developed very effective systems to promote positive behaviour and these are implemented consistently but unobtrusively by all staff. Pupils are beginning to manage their own behaviour and make sensible choices and decisions. They are friendly and welcoming to visitors: they say that there is no bullying and that they feel safe in school. Attitudes to learning are very positive but many pupils have low self-esteem and self-confidence and are reluctant to answer questions or give their opinions. However, pupils say that, 'it is never wrong to be wrong' and they understand that it is important to try their best and make the most of their time in school.

Pupils say they enjoy school. Attendance is in line with the national average and it is improving. Pupils feel valued and know that their opinions matter and this is having a very positive impact on all aspects of their personal development. The school is developing good links with the community, local schools and other agencies and this is making a strong contribution to pupils' development. Parents are welcomed in to school and the staff are establishing effective partnerships between home and school by ensuring that parents feel valued and part of the school community.

Quality of provision.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Relationships are good and teachers promote positive attitudes towards learning. The school has established robust systems and structures which are consistently applied in all classes. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about teaching. They are firmly committed to ensuring that pupils do well. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and pupils are given enough time to consolidate their learning. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to work in pairs or small groups or to discuss their ideas with others. When these opportunities are available pupils respond well and gain a great deal from the experience. Teachers plan lessons carefully using national guidance to ensure that work is pitched at levels which are appropriate for the age of their pupils. However, this does not always help pupils to make progress

because not all pupils have the skills needed to complete tasks successfully. In the most effective lessons pupils make good progress because teachers ensure that work is carefully matched to their current needs and ability.

All classes are supported by at least one teaching assistant. Although this is very useful in some classes, support staff do too much for pupils and this helps them to complete tasks which are beyond their capabilities. This means that although work is finished, pupils do not learn from the experience and teachers do not gain an accurate view of their achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support and as a result they progress at the same rate as their peers. Teachers' mark pupils work diligently but not all marking is helpful. Some marking appears to be designed for adults rather than children and does not provide learners with accurate guidance on how to improve. Although pupils have individual targets which are applied to all curriculum areas some teachers do not consider these sufficiently well when marking pupils' work. As a result some longstanding weaknesses are not being eradicated swiftly enough. Although some marking is helpful pupils are not given opportunities to act on the advice given. Teachers share the objectives of lessons with their pupils and ensure that they know when they have been successful. However, pupils do not evaluate their own progress and understanding and do not have opportunities to identify when they might need more support or challenge. The curriculum is satisfactory. Staff make effective use of cross-curricular links in order to make learning more interesting and meaningful for pupils. French is taught in Key Stage 2 classes and there is a reasonable range of after school activities. Visits and visitors do much to enrich the curriculum and to promote enjoyment of learning.

Pupils are well cared for and supported. The school has rigorous procedures to monitor attendance. Parents, carers and any other agencies involved with the child are contacted at an early stage during the first day of absence. This promotes regular attendance and ensures that pupils are kept safe. The school has implemented all the latest guidance to safeguard children and its procedures are rigorous. The school's religious ethos underpins all that it does and it is giving the children a good understanding of Christian beliefs and sound moral guidance.

Leadership and management

The leadership of the headteacher is good. She has high expectations and is determined that the school will provide pupils with an excellent education. Her vision is shared and accepted by all staff and sets the standard for the school. Nothing but the best is good enough and this applies equally to the excellence of the building and resources and to teaching and learning. She has managed the significant issues caused by the refurbishment programme and the transition to the new school effectively and she has not allowed this to distract her from ensuring that outcomes for pupils improve. She makes her expectations explicit and staff are rising to the challenge and responding with enthusiasm. The senior leadership team is

knowledgeable, hardworking and effective and they provide good role models for other staff.

The leadership team has established rigorous self-evaluation procedures. There is a regular programme of lesson observations and work scrutiny and staff receive accurate and detailed feedback which helps them to improve their work. The senior team have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have effective systems to measure the value they are adding to pupils' education and they analyse data rigorously in order to plan further improvements. The headteacher is ensuring that leadership is developing at all levels although, sensibly, she is tackling the most important priorities first. The raising achievement plan identifies the areas for improvement but is not sufficiently clear about how the steps taken will be monitored or how impact will be evaluated; in some cases the same person is responsible for both activities. However, the plan is well structured and provides clear guidance which has helped the school make a good start.

The governing body is effective. Governors are committed to the school and bring a range of skills to their role. They share the headteacher's ambitions for the school and have a very good understanding of its current strengths and the areas which are yet to be developed. Governors have a realistic view of the time it will take to establish the school and ensure that it delivers at least a good standard of education but they are determined that this will be accomplished as quickly as possible.

External support

The school has received very effective help and support from the LA and from the diocese. This support has been both practical and financial and it has helped the school to get off to the best possible start. The LA has established a school support group and there are regular meetings which ensure that information about the school is shared and that the headteacher can call on additional expertise if the need arises. Senior officers receive regular progress reports and are well placed to take prompt action to bring about improvement if this should become necessary. The LA has brokered additional support for the school from the school improvement partner (SIP). The SIP is experienced and effective and she is helping the senior team to validate their judgements and establish a secure evidence base.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is good.

- Use information gained from marking and day-to-day assessment to plan work which helps pupils overcome weaknesses in their basic skills.
- Ensure that the tasks pupils are given are accurately matched to their ability.
- Develop school wide strategies to encourage all pupils to answer questions and contribute their ideas and opinions.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocese and the Director of Children's Services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector