

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

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

Dear Mrs Murphy

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Holy Trinity CofE Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

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

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leadership team, a middle manager, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The number of pupils in the school has increased. More children joined the school in the Reception class than left at the end of Year 6. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is now teaching the Year 1 class and her responsibilities have been extended to cover the leadership of Key Stage 1. Two teachers have taken up permanent positions in the school under a job share arrangement and a third teacher is employed on a fixed term contract. A fourth teacher has been promoted to a post outside of the school and he will leave the school at the end of the autumn term. The extensive building work in the school is now complete and, for the first time, pupils can now use all parts of the school building and the grounds.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. When children start school they can do less than others of their age. A high proportion of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have speech and language difficulties and many lack independent or social skills. Children make good and sometimes exceptionally good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage unit. In 2009, children's achievement, as measured by assessments carried out at the end of the Reception Year, was in line with and sometimes above that of their peers in other schools. Pupils did not achieve as well in Key Stage 1. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 was very low. Although many pupils had a significant legacy of underachievement, the school is aware that they did not progress well enough during the year because the provision made for them was not good enough. The outcomes of national tests taken at the end of Year 6 were very positive. The proportion of pupils who attained the nationally expected Level 4 and the higher Level 5 in all core subjects was in line with national averages in 2009. The attainment of this year group was also in line with national averages at the end of Year 2 so their achievement was satisfactory.

Pupils' progress is satisfactory and improving. The provision made for pupils in Year 1 is carefully matched to their ability and builds very effectively on their previous learning. Pupils in this class are making rapid progress and they thoroughly enjoy learning. Good progress is also evident in Year 5. Pupils are given tasks which help them to tackle earlier weaknesses and develop planning, problem solving and evaluative skills. Outcomes in other year groups are more variable. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons. They have positive attitudes and work hard. They complete tasks which help them to acquire knowledge at a reasonable rate, but they have too few opportunities to apply this knowledge in problem-solving activities or to identify weaknesses in their work and find ways to improve. The most able pupils are not challenged enough in some lessons and they spend too long repeating activities or consolidating existing strengths. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress overall because they are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. However, they do not always progress well enough in lessons, particularly in literacy, because the work they are given is not well enough matched to their needs.

The school is tackling past underachievement and improving pupils' basic skills. Pupils' handwriting is improving, especially in those classes where teachers pursue improvement with vigour and determination, and their spelling is generally accurate. Pupils are making increasingly adventurous word choices. The school is piloting the 'Every Child a Reader' programme. It is too early to evaluate the success of this strategy but pupils of all ages respond positively to the school's efforts to improve their reading skills. Although pupils are happy to read independently or to an adult, some older pupils do not have a secure grasp of phonics and they lack strategies to identify or spell unfamiliar words.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school building has been refurbished to a very high standard and the accommodation makes a substantial contribution to pupils' well-being and personal development. The hall was completed in time for the start of the new academic year and it has become the focal point of the school. The school's attention to detail and its promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly evident in this area. There are spaces for reflection and for celebrating and reinforcing the contribution pupils make to the school and wider community. There are very good arrangements for dining. Pupils sit at small tables and they can choose to socialise with siblings or friends. Pupils behave well and there is a marked improvement in their attitudes to and enjoyment of learning. Pupils say that they feel safe and they are aware of how to live a healthy lifestyle and avoid dangerous activities. Pupils make an increasingly positive contribution to the school and local community.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is satisfactory overall and the proportion of good and better teaching is increasing. Teachers plan lessons carefully. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and teachers help their pupils to tackle weaknesses in their basic skills. In the best lessons teachers take note of information gained from marking and from pupils' own evaluations of their learning and progress to plan tasks which help pupils build on existing skills and extend their understanding. In less successful lessons pupils are given different tasks but some are not well enough matched to their needs or interests. Teachers' expectations of what their pupils will achieve are too variable. In most classes pupils have opportunities to work with a partner or small group. They discuss their ideas and rehearse responses to teachers' questions. This is having a very positive impact on their confidence and on their learning. However, some teachers do not make enough of the opportunities this provides to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills. In many lessons, pupils continue to provide one or two word answers to questions and pupils have too few opportunities to challenge the response of others or to add extra information. Teacher talk and direction continues to dominate in about half of all lessons. Some teachers talk for too long and pupils have too little time to work on independent or group tasks.

The curriculum is good and in Year 1 is particularly good. It helps pupils to experience a very smooth transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage and to build on their existing knowledge and skills. Pupils learn through practical 'fun' activities and 'challenges'. The teacher knows her pupils well and the curriculum is personalised to their needs and interests. The school has implemented a 'creative curriculum' in Years 2 to 6. This curriculum includes most of the foundation subjects but also provides pupils with very good opportunities to consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills and to use information and communication technology. There is a focus on the development of independent learning skills and on group work and

decision making. In one class this is already having a marked impact on pupils' learning. They plan, organise and evaluate their work and decide how it might be improved. They give detailed feedback to their peers using clear criteria. This way of working is very new to some teachers and the effectiveness and speed of implementation is a little too variable. The school is aware of this and monitors the impact and the delivery of the creative curriculum rigorously. Staff have been given help with planning and they are provided with a comprehensive package of resources. The coordinator is to work alongside her colleagues and model best practice. The school has implemented a scheme of work for handwriting and a commercial scheme to promote pupils' writing skills. There are a range of intervention strategies which are designed to help pupils 'catch up' with their peers.

The school supports its pupils well. It has very robust procedures to identify and track the progress of vulnerable pupils or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are very good relationships between staff and pupils and thorough and regular risk assessments ensure that all pupils are kept safe. Pupils receive very good moral, social and spiritual guidance. The parish priest is a regular visitor and the school has secure partnerships with a range of external agencies.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership is good. The headteacher is very effective and she has developed a talented and hard working team of senior and middle managers. The school's leaders are very ambitious. They want only the best for their pupils and, although the school has come a long way in its first year, they are not content with its broadly satisfactory outcomes. They are willing to take calculated risks in order to improve provision and ensure that pupils achieve well. The senior team have a very good understanding of the process of school improvement. They monitor the work of the school carefully and they have an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. They realise that some teachers will require more support than others if they are to implement new ways of working effectively but they know that in the longer term this will lead to improvements in pupils' achievement so it is time well spent. Governance is satisfactory and improving. The governing body and the diocese have supported the school very effectively. Governors have a good

understanding of the school but they are aware that they do not always provide enough challenge. There are plans to improve this situation. The governors ensure that the school fulfils all its statutory duties. The school's procedures to safeguard its pupils comply with all the latest guidance and the school has evidence to show that all staff and regular visitors and volunteers are checked by the criminal records bureau. Despite the school's best efforts, staffing remains turbulent. Staff changes are unsettling for children and their parents and place an additional burden on the small senior team. Although the school made good progress in its first year, these uncertainties in staffing mean its capacity to make further improvements is satisfactory.

External support

The school has been well supported by the local authority. There are regular meetings of the steering group that evaluates the school's progress and these will continue for the foreseeable future. The local authority recognises that it does not need to provide additional support because the school has developed its own capacity to improve.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching by:
 - using information from day-to-day assessment to plan work which helps pupils to develop new skills and apply their knowledge in problem-solving tasks
 - reducing the proportion of teacher talk and direction and providing more time for pupils to work on individual and group tasks
 - ensuring that systems to help pupils evaluate their work and progress at key points during the lesson are implemented consistently
 - providing opportunities for teachers to work alongside senior and middle leaders in order to develop new practice and ensure that the creative curriculum is taught effectively in all classes.

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

Yours sincerely
Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector