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Thursday 8 July 2010

Miss Veronica Fenlon
St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School
Beaufort Road
Erdington
Birmingham
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Dear Miss Fenlon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Michael Lafford to your school on Monday 5 July 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham local authority and the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham office.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on Monday 5 July 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised key strategic documents and met with the headteacher, senior leadership team, the Chair of Governing Body, representatives from the local authority and the two consultant headteachers called National Leaders in Education working with the school. Other meetings were held with those responsible for care, guidance and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are in the early stages of speaking English in the school. Inspectors also met informally with groups of pupils, conducted a work scrutiny and observed 13 lessons and two assemblies.

Context

The school continues to receive substantial additional support from the local authority and from two neighbouring support schools. This support is usually in the form of additional capacity at leadership level from two headteachers who also provide advice and consultancy with advanced skills teachers from their own schools. However, the nature of this support is changing with an appropriate decline in the extent of support required and a more refined focus on classroom practice. Staffing changes have continued with the arrival of the new deputy headteacher and the long term absence of a teacher. There will be further changes in the autumn term with the arrival of five new members of staff. The governing body has been reduced in number from 16 to 10 members. There have been some improvements to the site, although it is recognised by the headteacher and governing body that the premises remain tired and in need of refurbishment in general, especially the old infant buildings. Numbers on roll have stabilised at 386. The school has been given permission to appoint one newly qualified teacher from September.

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

The progress being made by pupils across the school is improving and is now close to satisfactory in mathematics, reading and more generally in some classes. Despite this welcome improvement, attainment remains low. In the 2010 national tests, 63% of pupils in Year 6 reached the required levels in English with a similar proportion achieving this in both English and mathematics. This represents good improvement on the levels in 2009 and is in line with the targets set by the school, but remains below national expected levels. In mathematics in 2009 just over half the pupils reached national expected levels, whereas this figure is 70% in 2010.

Children start in the Nursery with standards that are either below or well below those expected for their age, particularly in language and numeracy skills. The



proportion who start with additional needs or who are in the early stages of learning English is also increasing over time. Despite this, they make a good start in developing a satisfactory vocabulary for both wider language use and number skills and enjoy their time in Nursery. Increasingly, this start is being used to build core language and number skills, albeit with some inconsistencies.

A key weakness is in the quality of pupils writing which is significantly low and well below standards of reading throughout the school. The school's own data, now much more accurate, indicates that less than half of the pupils will reach the expected level in their writing. The main concerns are a lack of basic punctuation and grammar alongside weak spelling skills. Pupils' presentation of work is mixed but improving in some classes. These weaknesses cap performance in some other subjects, such as history and geography.

There are some significant variations in performance between groups of pupils. The school now tracks this variation in detail and recognise that the performance of boys in literacy, especially writing, is well below that of girls. Both are significantly below national levels. Similarly, too few pupils reach the higher levels by the end of Year 6 with a disappointing 9% managing it in English and a slight dip in mathematics on the previous year. There are also some underperforming but smaller groups of pupils which include children who are in the care of the local authority. These groups are making improvements but steadily rather than rapidly, and are below their peers nationally.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school – satisfactory progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school now monitors the attendance of individual pupils closely, and encourages high attendance and punctuality via a range of rewards and sanctions. As a consequence, attendance has risen to satisfactory levels. The school has also had significant success in bringing some long-term absentees back into school. Behaviour is generally good in lessons and satisfactory outside. Some pupils complain about low level disruption by others but say that it is usually sorted out quickly. Behaviour is noticeably better when teaching is stronger. There have been eight fixed term exclusions recently which do not sit easily with the school's inclusive ethos.

The school is now enjoying a close relationship with the community and participates in off-site visits, performances, and charitable collections. The school choir, for example, are about to perform in the Symphony Hall in Birmingham. A recent multi-faith week and themed lessons show children how to value diversity and appreciate the wide cultural heritage, both within school and the local community. This is a caring school which welcomes newcomers and has a thoughtful induction process for



new pupils. As a result, pupils show consideration for each other, enjoy school and feel safe. The care shown to them by adults is good. There is a strong spiritual element evident throughout the school and the Catholic ethos is strongly promoted by the current leadership. As a consequence of this, relationships within school are positive and supportive.

The school provides good care, guidance and support with robust procedures for child protection and adults strive to make sure that pupils are able to learn in a safe environment. The school has established effective partnerships with outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Pupils who have particular needs or difficulties are well supported. Their progress is carefully tracked to ensure that they progress at least as well as their peers. However, although help for pupils who have English as an additional language is in place, it is not consistent.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Around 18 months ago the proportion judged as inadequate was 45%: during this inspection only one lesson slipped below satisfactory and 50% were judged as good. Key strengths in these lessons were secure relationships with pupils, good use of resources, much improved questioning techniques which promoted greater involvement of pupils, and detailed lesson planning. Teachers and other adults are working hard to implement the extensive guidance they have received recently. Pupils have recognised these efforts and appreciate them: they now enjoy their lessons and are proud of their school. They are particularly pleased with the greater opportunity to take part in practical and problem-solving lessons. Teachers increasingly use assessment information to plan the next steps in pupils' learning in detail.

Despite these strengths, there are some consistent aspects which prevent teaching from being judged as good or better. These include unnecessarily limited expectations by teachers about what pupils are capable of achieving. This is contributing to the slow progress made by more able pupils. Other general weaknesses include teachers talking for too long and missed opportunities to develop literacy in all subjects. The subject knowledge of some teachers, especially in mathematics, is fragile on occasions.

There is now a satisfactory curriculum, with appropriate balance and breadth, and an emphasis on core skills. It is strengthened by additional clubs and activities, including themed days and residential visits. However, the curriculum still lacks the full engagement of all groups and is about to undergo an appropriate revision. For some classes it lacks sparkle. There is too little time spent on writing and the long afternoon sessions for the older pupils' leads to some drift in the pace of learning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:



- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring pupils' differing learning needs are met – good progress
- Ensure the school curriculum promotes enjoyment and achievement and better matches the learning needs and interests of all pupils – satisfactory progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The capacity of leadership to secure continued improvement is good. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher, alongside a restructuring of the wider leadership team has provided a clear focus for more effective monitoring. The headteacher is an effective decision maker and is popular with pupils. She is determined to secure improvement across the school. Together, this wider team is increasingly strategic, with an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, and is ambitious for change. The new school improvement plan is a promising document and places raising attainment at its heart. However, it currently lacks precise and ambitious targets. The 2010 targets, for example, were safe rather than aspirational. A significant improvement is the accuracy of data now generated and the increasingly effective way it is used to plan for future developments and improved pupil progress.

The recent revision to the size of the governing body has helped increase its effectiveness. It is well led by an experienced and very effective Chair. As a consequence, members of the governing body are more visible in school and increasingly challenging about the school's performance. This level of monitoring is generating a clear view about the school's strengths and weaknesses, but it is not yet used fully in core strategic documentation.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Make sure that leaders and managers, including governors, rigorously monitor and evaluate the work of the school in order to bring about rapid improvement – good progress.

External support

There is good support from both the local authority and neighbouring support schools with the work of two National Leaders in Education as consultant headteachers. It is both extensive and generous, and increasingly tailored to support an improving school. It is appropriately used to refine classroom practice for moving to consistently good and build examples of outstanding practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve standards of attainment in writing and literacy, especially for boys.
- Ensure the curriculum review is monitored closely so that it leads to a close match to individual pupils' needs, especially the more able pupils.
- Develop outstanding practice in teaching, and offer greater challenge and expectation to pupils in every class rather than in some.