

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

Direct Tel: 01695 566930
Direct Fax: 01695 729320

Email –lpitt@cfbt.com

www.ofsted.gov.uk



21 March 2007

Mr J Fish
Interim Headteacher
St Mary's C of E Aided Primary School
Rectory Lane
Prestwich
Manchester
Lancashire
M25 1BP

Dear Mr Fish

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARY'S C OF E AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOL, PRESTWICH

Introduction

Following my visit with Joan McKenna, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 March 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 October 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 lessons and one assembly. They examined documents and a range of pupils' work. Discussions were held with the headteacher, key staff, the school council, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

At the time of the inspection in October 2006, the current deputy headteacher was acting headteacher and had been running the school for a short time. With the support of a part-time consultant/mentor this continued until December 2006. In January 2007, an interim headteacher was appointed and the acting headteacher resumed the substantive post of

deputy headteacher. There has been little additional change to staffing except a temporary teacher has recently been appointed to cover the maternity leave of a full-time teacher. Governors wish to appoint a permanent headteacher by January 2008.

Achievement and standards

Children start in the Nursery with skills broadly in line with their age. Test results from 2006 showed standards for pupils leaving the school at Year 6 were broadly average. Nevertheless, too many pupils, particularly the more able and those who fall just below average, are not achieving as well as they should. Performance in the national tests in 2006 was poorer than in previous years.

In response to the outcome of the last inspection, the school started in early January 2007 to measure pupils' standards in greater detail. With the help of the LA, staff are being trained in a range of ways to measure and track pupils' progress. Based on available early data in writing and mathematics, the school has identified a substantial number of pupils who continue to underachieve. This is a similar picture to that at the time of the October 2006 inspection. However, spotting this underachievement early is an improvement on previous practice. The school has started booster and additional support work for those with the greatest needs but it is not yet broad enough.

Monitoring of pupils' work in literacy, mathematics and science points to a range of issues the school has identified for more detailed attention. For example, in science in most classes, pupils are not sufficiently challenged, particularly in their independent work. In some classes, the more able pupils in literacy have been identified as needing a better balance between written exercises and independent writing. This is beginning to happen. Whilst the interim headteacher has identified the appropriate steps to be taken and all staff are moving in the right direction, developments are at a very early stage.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2006:

- Raise standards and improve children's achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and science – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The strengths identified at the time of the inspection in October 2006 have been maintained. Children are self-assured, polite and enjoy school. Attendance is good. The school council is positive about the work done in school recently about 'building on relationships'. Its members are especially

pleased about the work relating to the playground to ensure pupils' behaviour is as good as it should be.

Quality of provision

The system for tracking pupils' progress shows some improvement since the October 2006 inspection. At that time, pupils' progress was only tracked formally at the end of each academic year, not frequently enough to tackle underachievement effectively. The school's new system has several potential benefits. It is designed to enable quick identification of weaknesses in achievement that need to be tackled and to help determine the action to be taken. Managers believe it will help sharpen teachers' accountability for the progress of pupils in their classes and provide related information for monitoring by the interim headteacher, key staff and governors. Information generated so far has not been fully analysed and thus is not yet used sufficiently to promote improvement, either by individual teachers or strategically. Some teachers have used the information to refine groupings of pupils within their class, but it is not yet used with the precision to ensure that activities fully meet the needs of all groups of pupils, especially the more able.

There has been some monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, through observing lessons and scrutinising planning and pupils' work. This has involved senior staff and some subject leaders. These checks have also involved the LA's officers. Teachers have received verbal and, in some cases, written feedback on the outcomes. While useful points have been raised and in specific cases there has been a positive effect, overall, the monitoring has had insufficient impact. The usefulness of some of the earlier monitoring of lessons was limited, because it did not focus enough on the links between teaching and pupils' learning. More recent observations have resulted in a fuller range of questions and issues being identified and discussed with teachers. Some of the strengths of teaching identified in the October 2006 inspection are still evident, such as the good behaviour arising from the teachers' careful management of pupils. The pupils have positive attitudes and are keen to learn. However, the main weaknesses identified are also still evident. There continues to be a lack of dynamism and pace in some classes, which means pupils are not fully engaged by the work; this limits their learning. Different tasks are set for groups of pupils, but because teachers are not fully clear about pupils' levels of attainment, the pitch of the work for each group is still not always appropriate. The feedback given to pupils on how to improve their work is inconsistent and not secure enough to help them know how to improve. Some marking, especially of writing, is thorough and precise but much is too general and concentrates more on presentation and effort than evaluating the quality and informing pupils how to improve.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2006:

- Use information from tracking children's progress and from monitoring the quality of provision to improve the quality of teaching and learning – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher, supported by the governors and key staff, has created a positive climate for improvement. Developments are gathering pace in comparison with the period immediately after the inspection. All staff are keen to play their full part in moving the school on, in line with the key dates set out in the recently amended action plan. Each part of the plan is designed to build step by step and at a rate judged by the interim headteacher, chair of governors and inspectors to be sustainable. The plan identifies more clearly how actions taken will improve pupils' standards and achievement. The LA is playing its part in supporting each stage of this progression.

There are appropriate procedures for the literacy and numeracy coordinators to check on the quality of teachers' planning and pupils' work. These checks are in the early stages but are beginning to bear fruit. They are a useful precursor to greater involvement in understanding more accurately pupils' standards and achievement, and the quality of teaching and learning. Sharpening the focus on pupils' writing and reading skills is at the forefront of improvement, followed closely by a greater understanding of how well pupils achieve in mathematics. All of this work still has some way to go before it is fully effective. There are signs of similar approaches to improvement in science but these are at an even earlier stage.

The interim headteacher and chair of governors have ensured that a number of different committees of the governing body are now operating. Governors are clear about their roles on these committees and are ready to monitor and evaluate evidence of pupils' standards and achievement, as data start to become available in the near future. At this point, the school will begin to have relevant evidence against which to measure success and to evaluate its effectiveness more accurately.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2006:

- Strengthen the capacity of governors, the acting headteacher and other managers to check how well the school is doing and to take appropriate action to secure improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The timescale set by the LA in its statement of action for the school to emerge from special measures in December 2007 is ambitious. The date carried in the LA's recent monitoring and support plan for removal from special measures - before June 2008 - is more realistic. The quality and impact of the statement of action and the subsequent external support provided by the LA are satisfactory. A range of consultants and advisers is working with staff and pupils. Their support is valued by the school and is proving of particular benefit, for example, in improving literacy and in ways of assessing and checking on pupils' progress. The level of impact in mathematics is not yet as great.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The issues identified in the inspection of October 2006 remain the schools priorities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education and Culture for Bury, and the Acting Director of the Diocese of Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Simm
Additional Inspector