

2 November 2007

Mrs R Blakemore
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Wheatland Lane
Wallasey
Merseyside
CH44 7ED

Dear Mrs Blakemore

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

Following my visit with Stephen Wall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 31 October and 1 November 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2006. 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 – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Director of Children's Services of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and to the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
H M Inspector

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

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 31 October and 1 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated members of staff, several groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit a permanent headteacher and a permanent deputy headteacher have been appointed. A new chair of governors has also been appointed. Several members of staff have left the school. One class is taught by a temporary teacher. Staffing is more stable than at the time of the last monitoring inspection.

Achievement and standards

Standards at Key Stage 2 have improved overall. In the 2007 national assessments for Year 6 pupils, results at the expected Level 4 rose in English, mathematics and science. Improvement was strongest in English, where results rose from 61% to 85%. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 in science rose from 73% to 91%. Results in mathematics have also improved but at a slower rate than in other subjects; 70% of pupils achieved the level expected for this age group in this subject. The results of the more able pupils also improved in some subjects. In English, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 rose from 27% to 33%. In science, it rose from 27% to 30%. However, results in mathematics at this level fell in 2007, and at 9% were very low. Unvalidated data and inspection evidence suggest that pupils in Key Stage 2, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are now making satisfactory progress overall. The school recognises that raising attainment in mathematics and for the more able pupils are key areas on which it must focus.

In Key Stage 1, the overall attainment for pupils in 2006 was significantly below average. The most recent assessments indicate that there has been only a slight improvement in this position. Standards in writing have risen but those in reading have dipped slightly. Pupils performed most strongly in mathematics, and unvalidated data suggest that results in this subject were broadly in line with the national average. The more able pupils performed best in mathematics and less well in reading. Performance was weakest in writing, where no pupils achieved the higher Level 3. In the Foundation Stage, inspection evidence indicates that pupils are making at least satisfactory progress and that some are making good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being and their enjoyment of school are satisfactory. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Behaviour is satisfactory around the school and often good in classrooms. It is at its best when lessons are interesting and stimulating. Where it is satisfactory in classes, it is because too much talking by teachers at the start of lessons leads to learners becoming restless. Pupils play safely and well together in the playground. They have a number of opportunities to exercise responsibility such as working in the new 'snack shack', and as play leaders and school councillors. The attendance of pupils remains below average and has declined slightly since 2006. This is largely due to holidays taken during term time. The school is doing everything it can to improve attendance and works closely with the LA's attendance officers.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving steadily, although there are still inconsistencies to be ironed out. The school is starting to use examples of good practice to raise the proportion of good teaching by using peer mentoring, but it is too early yet for the full impact of this to be felt. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen. Their planning is thorough and takes greater account of pupils' differing needs and abilities. However, in some classes the higher attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged with the result that they do not make the progress they should. Consistently good relationships between pupils and adults help to establish a respectful and secure environment for learning. Teachers are becoming increasingly adept at making use of assessment information to set targets for pupils. However, some pupils are not fully aware of what their targets are, how well they are progressing and what they need to do to achieve their targets. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously. Where marking is most effective, it clearly indicates what level the pupils are working at and what they need to do to improve; this is particularly the case in English for older pupils.

Teaching in the Foundation Stage is lively and most pupils in lessons observed during the inspection made good progress, especially in their personal and social development. The Foundation Stage curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of stimulating activities to encourage them to become inquisitive learners. It provides a solid starting point for their success in later years.

In Years 1 to 6 the quality of teaching and learning varies; it is never less than satisfactory. Where it is good, teaching is conducted at a good pace and has a clear focus on learning. Activities stimulate pupils' interest and fully engage them. Expectations are high and pupils respond with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Teachers make learning objectives very clear so that pupils can see not only what they are going to learn but also why. Questions are asked sensitively in order to match the ability of individual pupils and to make them really think. Teachers also use time at the end of lessons effectively, for example, to check on how well pupils have understood, to correct any misunderstandings and to celebrate success. The

information gained is then used to adjust planning for next time. Where teaching is satisfactory the pace of lessons is slower and teachers do too much talking with the result that pupils become restless and their rate of learning slows. Questions are posed which are not open-ended enough to encourage pupils to express their ideas at length. Some pupils do not take an active part in oral or group work. They are not challenged rigorously enough to join in. They become passive rather than active learners.

Care, guidance and support for pupils remain satisfactory overall but are improving as procedures for tracking and assessing pupils' progress start to make an impact on attainment, as seen in the improved 2007 Key Stage 2 results, particularly in English. Procedures for identifying and tracking the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been strengthened so that more focused support is now provided for these pupils. Information on progress and targets is now being shared with parents and pupils at regular intervals throughout the school year to help raise standards and achievement further.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher, who was the acting headteacher at the time of the last monitoring inspection, has continued to provide sound leadership for the school. She has high expectations and is committed to improving the school. The recent appointment of a deputy headteacher has further strengthened the leadership team. These permanent appointments have removed uncertainty over the school's leadership and have contributed to the high morale of staff and to the greater sense of common purpose evident in the school.

Significant improvements have been made to the school environment. New resources have been bought for mathematics and there are plans to improve computing facilities and resources for the more able pupils. Careful thought has been given to how staff are deployed so that their strengths can be best utilised. Staff are better informed about school policies, routines and initiatives through staff meetings and briefings. New policies have been implemented, such as that for teaching and learning. This would benefit from extra detail describing the key features of good and outstanding lessons. A homework policy has been agreed but has yet to be fully implemented. Appropriate plans exist to develop a marking policy. However, there is, as yet, no staff handbook in which policies, routines and agreed improvement measures can be succinctly explained to new staff.

The school remains committed to a national strategy designed to raise achievement in English and mathematics. This has already had a noticeable impact on standards in English at Key Stage 2. The school continues to make good use of the LA's consultants linked to this initiative. Following advice from them, the school has taken the important step of drawing up its own action plan for the next stage of this strategy. Consequently, the school is beginning to take more ownership of its improvement agenda.

Progress on addressing additional priorities identified by the last monitoring inspection has been satisfactory overall. The school's assessment and tracking procedures have been satisfactorily developed. Some procedures are good. For example, an assessment week is now held at the end of each half term and data from this are entered onto a database to which every teacher has access. This information is then used to identify underperformance and to direct improvement strategies in English and mathematics. The progress of targeted groups of pupils is tracked regularly in greater depth. Apt plans exist to introduce an assessment system for science. However, there is, as yet, no formal assessment policy whereby information on assessment procedures can be drawn together. Limited progress has been made in sharing good practice in teaching. The recently introduced system of peer coaching has allowed staff moving to new year groups to be supported by experienced colleagues. Teaching assistants have visited a school to view outstanding practice and a similar visit is planned for teachers. There is scope for the school to exploit more fully opportunities to enable teachers to benefit from existing good practice both within and outside the school.

A range of monitoring strategies is now used by the school to check its work. This has increased the accountability of staff. The headteacher regularly visits classes, and areas for improvement are discussed with individual staff. Weaknesses in teaching have been tackled. The results of 'learning walks' by the headteacher around the school are shared with all staff. Pupils' work is regularly checked. Since the last monitoring inspection all teachers have been observed teaching literacy. However, there is scope to sharpen monitoring so that teachers know exactly the areas in which they must improve. The role of core subject leaders has been satisfactorily developed. Several subject leaders have received training in how to monitor teaching and learning and have jointly observed lessons with senior staff and LA personnel. Subject managers now have budgets for their subject areas. The subject leaders in English, mathematics and science monitor pupils' work and teachers' planning and provide useful feedback to colleagues. They have analysed the most recent statutory assessments and used this information to draw up action plans for their areas. Some plans, however, do not specify clearly enough the deadlines by when actions for improvement should be completed.

The school's evaluation of its academic performance has improved. A comprehensive analysis has been undertaken of the results of most recent end-of-year assessments. The achievement of vulnerable groups of pupils has also been analysed well. Consequently, the school has a greater understanding of where underachievement lies. This approach could usefully be extended into other areas of the school's work. The previous school improvement plan has been satisfactorily evaluated and a new plan drawn up. However, links between the new plan and the key areas for improvement, identified by the inspection in March 2006, need to be more clearly

defined. A useful summary of actions taken to address other issues for improvement identified by inspectors has also been compiled.

Governors continue to develop their role as a 'critical friend' to the school and are better placed to hold it to account for its work. A development plan for the governing body has been drafted. Several experienced governors have joined the governing body, which is now fully up to strength. A new chair of governors has been appointed. Governors are receiving more information on the school's academic progress and are developing their own systems for collecting information on the school's performance. For example, since the last monitoring inspection, governors who are linked to school subjects have observed lessons and reported their findings to the full body. Written reports are provided to the governing body by core subject leaders but there are few opportunities for subject managers to meet with governors and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their subject in detail. Governors are not yet fully involved in the setting of statutory targets.

Links with parents have been strengthened. Information provided by the school shows that more parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are attending meetings to review individual education plans. Parents are regularly informed of school and pupils' targets. There are suitable plans to increase the frequency of reporting the progress made by pupils to parents.

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

- Improve leadership and management so that:
 - the school has clear direction for improvement
 - monitoring ensures that staff at all levels are made accountable for standards and performance – satisfactory

External support

The LA has provided satisfactory support for the school. A school improvement officer visited the school regularly in the summer term. The LA is funding a national intervention strategy for a second year and the LA's consultants associated with this initiative provide strong support for the school. The school has drawn on the personnel resources of the LA and the diocese in recent key appointments. The headteacher is supported in her work by an experienced headteacher of another school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise the proportion of good teaching.
- Consolidate assessment procedures and the academic guidance which pupils receive.