

3 July 2008

Mrs D Aldred
St John's Church of England Primary School
Heath Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 2LE

Dear Mrs Aldred

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF St JOHN'S C of E
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with John Ashton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 July 2008, 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 January 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may 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 Education for the Diocese of Chester and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SANDBACH ST JOHN'S C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring visit on 1 and 2 July 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff, governors, representatives of the local authority (LA) and of the Diocese, and parents. They also talked to pupils formally and informally.

Context

Since the inspection in January, the school has a new acting headteacher. She took up her post on June 9 2008. She is on secondment to the school until 1 September 2009. A temporary teacher teaches the Year 2 class.

Achievement and standards

The results of the 2008 national, end of Key Stage 2 tests are not yet available. However, the school's assessments of pupils' standards and progress in Year 6 indicate that standards this year will be broadly average. This represents a better performance than in 2007 when results were below average. A smaller proportion than average is expected to reach the national expectation (Level 4) but a higher than average proportion is expected to reach the highest level (Level 5). There is a similar pattern at the end of Key Stage 1, where pupils' assessments show that broadly average standards have been achieved this year in reading, writing and mathematics. In writing, fewer children have achieved the national expectation but an above average proportion has achieved the higher Level 3.

From observations of pupils' work, good progress is being made in the Foundation Stage (Reception) and in Year 1, although the long standing legacy of underachievement and gaps in knowledge and understanding continue to prevent older pupils reaching the potential of which they are capable. There are a number of children from Traveller families attending the school. Their standards are usually lower than those of other pupils but they are well integrated into school life.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Raise pupils' achievement, especially in Years 3 to 6 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being were judged satisfactory in the inspection of January 2008 and continue to be so now. Most pupils are well behaved in lessons and around school. A small handful of pupils have clear problems with their behaviour that require and receive support. In lessons, variations in behaviour are closely related to the quality of teaching. When the pace of lessons is good, pupils have good attitudes to learning. When the pace of lessons is slow, pupils become bored and inattentive. Even in good lessons, teachers occasionally need to

apply behaviour management techniques. These techniques vary in consistency and effectiveness from class to class.

The inspection in January raised a concern about pupils' cultural development. This has been identified by the new acting headteacher as an issue of pupils' understanding of diversity in all its forms. A start has been made to make provision to teach this aspect of pupils' development and the school has plans of good quality for the future.

Attendance is broadly average. The school works closely with the LA's Education Welfare Service and Traveller Education Service.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning observed during the visit varied between satisfactory and good. It is satisfactory overall. Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage and in Year 1 are now strong. The Foundation Stage is now provided for separately and has improved significantly, benefiting particularly from guidance and support from the LA. Teachers are improving in self-confidence generally and have acquired new teaching skills through attending many courses of professional development. For example, their use of targets and assessment in planning their work and their involvement of pupils in judging their own progress are well advanced and can be seen in the improving quality of work and marking in books. A lack of pace in a few of the lessons seen led to a slow rate of learning, but also, aspects of the way the curriculum is currently organised have a negative impact on teaching and learning.

The curriculum is not sufficiently well balanced. Too much time is devoted to the direct teaching of English and mathematics and too little is made of opportunities to teach the basic skills of numeracy and literacy in other subjects. The length of time given over to literacy lessons in the morning meant teaching observed was sometimes stretched out and lacked a sense of urgency. The new initiative to split Years 3 to 5 into three teaching groups during the mornings does not appear to be successful, particularly for the lower attaining group who lack the motivation to learn from working with children of different abilities and aptitudes. The curriculum development in the Foundation Stage has been rapid and successful. For example, children in Reception have excellent opportunities to learn through play and self-chosen activities. A start has been made to broaden the curriculum through new venues for visits, new visitors to school and extension activities. The acting headteacher has recognised the need to evaluate these experiences to check what positive difference they make to pupils' learning.

Care for pupils continues to be a strength of the school. All safeguarding procedures are in place. The school has now secure systems for managers and teachers to keep pupils' progress and standards under check and to arrange to intervene where necessary.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and use of assessment – satisfactory.
- Provide a curriculum that better meets the needs of all pupils – inadequate.
- Ensure that academic guidance for pupils is effective in helping raise their achievement – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The change of leadership in the school since the inspection has caused further anxiety and concern among parents and pupils to add to that already felt as a result of the changes during 2007. The school has now had four headteachers within a two-year period. Parents have remained loyal to the school and to its staff throughout the difficulties it has faced. Numbers of pupils have held up. Parents are looking for a period of stability and, in particular, a smooth handover to a new substantive headteacher when the current acting headteacher's secondment ends in August 2009.

Some good progress has been made. The governing body is far more skilled and better organised than it was before the January inspection and in a better position to support the school and challenge it when needed. With the support of the LA and the Diocese, the governing body, now with two additional governors, has proved it can take tough decisions in the best interests of the school.

The new acting headteacher has made a good start, quickly gaining the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. Already, she has given the school a new sense of direction, based firmly on making a positive difference for pupils. Staff are rising to the challenge; morale is high. They have taken on much that is new to them. There is much to do to consolidate and develop provision that is consistently of good quality. This includes the important task of developing leadership at all levels, including the leadership of subjects.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that improvements in the school's provision and in outcomes for pupils are established and sustained – satisfactory.

External support

The school has received good quality support following the inspection from the LA and from the Diocese. They have responded quickly and positively. Indeed substantial support has been provided from last year, when the then headteacher fell ill. The LA has provided good support for the school and governing body, in line with its statement and proposed action submitted to and approved by Ofsted. It has facilitated training and professional development opportunities for staff and support for the acting headteachers. Much of this support has had significant positive impact, such as in the Foundation Stage. Together with the Diocese, the LA has successfully brokered a new arrangement to secure the new appointment of a new acting headteacher. Although early in the process of recovery, decisive and difficult decisions have been taken in the best interests of the school and its pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make the main priorities improving the quality of teaching and learning and, linked to this, development of the curriculum.
- Further develop the role of the governing body in its preparation for a smooth handover of leadership to a new substantive headteacher.