



5 July 2005

Mrs M Frazer
Headteacher
St Aloysius' RC Voluntary Aided Junior School
Argyle Street
Hebburn
Tyne and Wear
NE31 1BQ

Dear Mrs Frazer

Implementation of St Aloysius' RC Voluntary Aided Junior School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 30 June and 1 July 2005, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. I also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit I inspected ten lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period and an act of worship; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself and nominated staff on the causes and areas of underachievement. I also examined a range of the pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors, a representative from the diocese and an officer of the LEA.

The action plan is presented well. It is succinct and makes clear what needs to be done to address the underachievement. An appropriate range of personnel is identified to lead actions; monitoring is carried out by others to ensure objectivity. Accountability is not as clear because responsibilities are at times allocated to groups of people rather than to a named individual. Quantifiable success criteria are set to judge standards and achievement.

The school's results in the national tests for 11 year olds in 2004 were well below the national average in English, below average in mathematics and average in science. In comparison to schools whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2 standards were well below average in mathematics and science. In English they were in the bottom five per cent of similar schools.

The school has made good use of support from the LEA to improve the analyses of test results and act on the findings. Arrangements for assessment are developing and a coherent system for tracking the pupils' progress is being well led by the senior leadership team so that all staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities in raising standards. The information is used well to highlight early on any pupil who is not progressing fast enough and in mathematics to place pupils in teaching groups according to their level of attainment. Pupils and parents are aware of the group targets set to improve standards.

Since 2004 standards have risen appreciably at Year 6 so that in lessons the pupils' attainment was broadly at the expected level with an increased proportion attaining higher than typically expected for their age. Pockets of underachievement remain at Year 6, this being the group most adversely affected over time. In other year groups the pupils' attainment is relatively higher and better reflects the standards of which they are capable of achieving.

The pupils' writing addresses a range of styles and genre. Pupils make good use of opportunities for drafting and extending their writing, reflecting the priority given to it. The school is at an early stage in tackling the unsatisfactory quality of handwriting. Over half of the pupils in Year 6 are not yet regularly using a cursive script. The pupils do better at reading than writing. In mathematics the pupils' strengths are in computation; their weaknesses are in solving mathematical problems. Pupils often tend to use trial and error to solve problems rather than applying mathematical methods. The school has spent worthwhile time on making sure that opportunities are regularly provided for the pupils to apply their increasingly accurate computation to solving a growing range of mathematical problems. The application of skills and knowledge in science has also received priority and the curriculum is much more practical than it was, resulting in improved achievement.

The good attendance and punctuality of the pupils ensure that their learning is not interrupted. The school has improved the pupils' good behaviour and satisfactory attitudes found in the inspection of 2004. The pupils were very well behaved in class and around the school. At play times they made very good use of a wide range of equipment to promote their physical development and social skills. Their attitudes to learning were good. Pupils were very attentive during class discussions and many were keen to contribute.

The quality of teaching was good in six lessons and satisfactory in three. It was unsatisfactory in one lesson. Features of the effective teaching included relationships that were strong, resulting in the pupils being willing to share their

thoughts and feelings which contributed well to their writing. Good teaching drew extremely well upon the pupils' imagination and promoted spirituality very well. Good opportunities were given for the pupils to collaborate on tasks, to discuss their work and share ideas and opinions - all of which developed their skills at speaking effectively. Questioning was often of good quality and made the pupils think hard. Relative weaknesses in teaching included unsatisfactory role models for handwriting and an inconsistent quality in the marking of the pupils' work and the pupils' response to it. Lesson plans often concentrated on the activities to be provided and relied too much on outcomes rather than making sure that the match of work to the pupils' precise needs was fully addressed at the initial stage.

Pupils who have special educational needs make the same progress as others in their class. The pupils receive extra support as required although too much reliance is placed on the staff's knowledge of the pupils. The targets in individual educational plans to aid the teaching and learning are insufficiently precise and not always easily measurable.

The quality of learning closely matched the quality of teaching although was let down in one lesson by faulty resources in information and communication technology. The pupils were often enthusiastic and self-motivated. They took pride in their achievements although the presentation of work was not as neat and well set out as it needs to be to enable it to be used for future reference.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and very well enriched. The curriculum for English and mathematics makes good use of national strategies, including additional strategies to address the pupils' underachievement. The use of speaking, literacy and mathematics is beginning to be reflected well in other subjects although has yet to be fully embedded in the planning. A move away from work sheets to the expectation that pupils will record their findings independently is leading to more practical activities and an improved range of recording. The use of display to celebrate pupils' work and to provide charts for reference is good.

The headteacher has responded well to the issues which needed to be addressed and provides a driving force for improvement. This includes appropriate delegation and effective monitoring and evaluation. The deputy headteacher provides good support. The key roles of the senior leadership team are clear. Careful consideration has been given to ensure that any staff absence does not deter the school from making good headway in monitoring and evaluating the school's practice and initiating strategies to address weaknesses. Senior leaders provide good role models in their teaching. Subject leaders are developing a sound grasp of their subject responsibilities and are well supported in their work by the LEA and by other staff. Well considered changes are sensibly trialled by particular staff prior to implementation in all classes. Governors have an increasingly clear view of the school's strengths and the work still to be completed and are keen to see improvements are made. Helpful links with subject leaders have been established which broaden the governors understanding of standards and the curriculum. Self-evaluation by the school is helpful in showing what needs to be done next. It is

thorough and apposite. Initially it drew upon the LEA's guidance and support but the school is becoming increasingly independent and is placed in a good position to continue to raise standards.

The LEA is providing effective support and is meeting its commitment to the school as set out in its action plan. The support is well led by a school improvement officer who has helped the school to become self-evaluative, forward looking and focused on raising standards of achievement.

Evaluation of Progress:

The school is making good progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken, good progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors, the Director of Education for South Tyneside and the Diocesan Director of Education for Hexham and Newcastle. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

MRS LINDA MURPHY
Additional Inspector

cc chair of governors
LEA
diocese