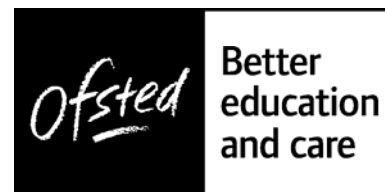


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6 December 2005

Mr E Maddox  
Advisory Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Cruso Street  
Leek  
Staffordshire  
ST13 8BW

Dear Mr Maddox,

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

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Susan Walsh, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 November 2005, 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 March 2005.

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 the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the advisory headteacher, other members of staff, governors, a representative of the LA and with pupils.

### **Context**

The headteacher has been absent since May 2005 and the governing body has appointed an advisory headteacher to the post until July 2006. The acting deputy headteacher has also been appointed for a further year in an advisory capacity. The assistant headteacher has been appointed to a newly created

substantive post and one other member of staff has resigned from January 2006. All members of the current senior management team have been in post since September 2005.

### **Achievement and standards**

Standards of writing and mathematics have been below average for all pupils and in mathematics and reading for more able pupils since 2004. These weaknesses still persist.

The results in 2005 show attainment in national tests with around a third of boys below average in English and mathematics. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels remains low overall. The performance of pupils in science is better and shows an improvement on 2004.

Pupil progress is below average in mathematics and in writing, especially when compared to similar schools. Since 2002 there have been no significant differences between the performance of girls and boys and between various groups of pupils in school. However in 2005 the performance of boys fell significantly below that of girls in mathematics and English for the first time. No boys achieved the higher levels in English or mathematics.

In lessons, most pupils read well and contribute to discussions with enthusiasm using a wide range of vocabulary. Standards of written work are improving but remain below average. There is an increased level of accuracy in spelling and sentence construction, but this is inconsistent. In one good example, pupils were able to identify adjectives to enhance their story writing and shared these with each other. Where the pupils' work was below expectations, the task set was not sufficiently challenging, the planning lacked detail and the pupils were unable to explain what kind of writing they were supposed to be doing. The pupils' presentation of written work is satisfactory.

In mathematics not all pupils are confident in using basic number skills. They can read and interpret simple bar charts and graphs and handle data efficiently. Pupils in Year 6 show an emerging understanding of decimals, for example when timing the flight of paper spinners in a science investigation. They can use calculators appropriately to work out averages. However they show some uncertainties in place value and not all pupil misunderstandings are corrected. The school has correctly identified the solving of word problems in mathematics, and shape and space as areas of underperformance.

### **Personal development and well-being**

The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Spiritual education is especially strong in this Catholic primary school. Links with the local community and parents have improved significantly. Substantial efforts have been made to improve

communication with parents, to answer parental concerns and to raise the self-esteem of pupils, staff and the local community. The pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is improving through development of the school council, involvement in sporting competitions and extra curricular activities. Although pupils enjoy school, attendance rates of 93.2% are below the national average. A significant number of pupils were absent during the visit.

Behaviour is considerably better in lessons than around the school in general. In corridors and at break-times some pupils were disorderly and disruptive. Behaviour outside classrooms is inadequate. On occasions pupils are unsupervised and have little opportunity for structured play. This is true for all ages, for example, on the playground older boys dominate the area with ball games leaving some younger pupils less confident in their own play.

In lessons, the pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They answer questions enthusiastically, work hard and want to do well. Their achievements are actively rewarded and shared with parents during assemblies. Pupils are generally confident and have high self-esteem. Most have good manners but a minority require considerable staff time to manage behaviour. There have been no exclusions this term. Incidents of bullying are rare but are not always dealt with quickly.

### **Quality of provision**

Teachers continue to be very hard working and committed to improvement; lessons are carefully planned and usually well presented. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. A quarter of lessons observed were good, but two were inadequate.

In the best lessons teachers had high expectations, asked open and challenging questions and maintained a brisk pace throughout by thoughtful use of timings and activities. Teachers are increasingly providing opportunities for pupils to offer extended answers to questions. In one good lesson observed pupils were also asked to evaluate each other's work and did so sensitively and accurately. They then helped set improvement targets for one another.

Where the teaching was unsatisfactory the main issues were: a lack of challenge for the higher attaining pupils; lesson plans that failed to take account of the mixed ages and abilities within the group and offered little detail about how progress was to be measured. Pupils' misunderstandings were not always corrected by the teachers, allowing them to retain erroneous ideas. Pupils sometimes spent considerable time in lessons listening to instructions before being allowed to work on their own tasks.

A number of weaknesses were common, even in lessons that were satisfactory overall. In too many lessons the pace of introductory sessions

was too slow and too many questions remained closed and simplistic; tasks set were frequently too easy, especially in mathematics. Some teaching of the youngest pupils is unsatisfactory because activities lack clear learning objectives and do not sufficiently extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Assessment is now more accurate and data has been effectively analysed by senior members of staff. Improved assessment procedures have resulted in a much closer match of work to pupils' capabilities and better-focused support, especially in mathematics. Many teachers are starting to use assessment to better judge pupils' understanding. Marking is also improving in quality and accuracy. In some classes it is evaluative and constructive with targets for improvement made clear to pupils alongside some praise for effort. This is not yet consistent however, and the youngest pupils would benefit from additional guidance in literacy skills.

An improvement to the curriculum includes changes to the school day to extend teaching time and meet the pupils' needs. The curriculum continues to focus on raising standards of literacy and numeracy. However there has not been time to measure the impact of these changes on standards. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is inadequate overall. Interesting activities are planned for children in the nursery but activities in the Foundation Stage lack focus unless they are led directly by adults.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005.

- Use the school's assessment information and data effectively to improve the pace of pupils' progress and ensure that all pupils achieve suitably high standards - satisfactory progress.

## **Leadership and management**

A revised school improvement plan was completed in summer 2005. The plan is satisfactory but has some weaknesses. It lacks detail in many areas, including who is responsible for monitoring progress and the level of resources required. Appropriate success criteria have not always been provided for those areas requiring improvement.

The advisory headteacher has ensured the school has taken appropriate and decisive steps to tackle the issues outlined in the last inspection. He has completed a review of the school's work, reallocated resources and helped governors to set out new and suitable priorities. He has made clear to staff and governors those aspects of school standards that are inadequate. He has established a fresh ethos closely focused on improving standards.

The school has also benefited from the work of the acting deputy headteacher, in particular in modelling good teaching and revising assessment practices. Together the senior management team has restored a sense of

purpose and direction to the work of the school. However, the governors are aware that the current arrangements are temporary and there remains much to be done to secure long term stability in the school's senior management. Much of the improvement is being driven by staff who are not permanent appointments. As a result, progress remains inadequate despite the current level of provision.

The role of subject leaders is underdeveloped. Their contribution to monitoring and training in their subjects is inconsistent. They have completed some analysis and planning for the future and have a clear set of priorities, but have yet to secure improvements in standards. Resources allocated to mathematics and English are reasonable and most subject leaders have detailed and appropriate plans to monitor standards of teaching and attainment throughout school.

The governors have recognised the new sense of rigour and direction currently being installed. They welcome this and have established a set of smaller committees to monitor progress. They accept the criticisms in the previous report and understand what action needs to be taken to secure permanent improvement. They have correctly identified future priorities and have recognised the urgency required of them. Due to the temporary nature of current staffing the capacity to improve remains inadequate.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005.

- Ensure the role of the headteacher includes effective leadership of the school's priorities for improvement, including providing accurate reports on the progress to the governing body – inadequate progress
- Establish a senior management structure that enables staff to fulfil their responsibilities within a team approach - inadequate progress
- Establish a clear management responsibility for pupils' progress throughout the school – satisfactory progress.

### **External support**

The local authority's statement of action and support to the school is good. The improvement plan provides a helpful context for the changes and considers all aspects that are required of it. It details actions for each area of concern and makes clear specific actions and who is responsible for monitoring progress made. The governors are appreciative of the level and quality of local authority support provided to the school.

### **Main Judgements**

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Establish a rigorous system of monitoring teaching that develops the role of subject leaders.
- Establish a senior management structure which secures improvements in standards and that is sustainable.
- Develop an effective curriculum in the Foundation Stage which builds upon the good practice in the nursery.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocesan Director of Schools, the advisory headteacher and the Director of Children and Lifelong Learning for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Mr C. Morgan  
**H M Inspector**