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Miss M Curran
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Curran

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SACRED HEART CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Ms J McKenna, additional inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 March 2006, 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 September 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

Observations were made of one assembly and lessons in each class. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the co-ordinator for mathematics and a representative from the local authority (LA). A range of documents was examined, and pupils' conduct was observed around the school and at breaktime.

Context

Since September 2005, the school has enjoyed a period of much more stable staffing than previously, although one teacher has subsequently returned from maternity leave and a temporary teacher has been employed to cope with the additional intake

of pupils in January. Negotiations are under way for the school to become part of a federation with two other local Catholic primary schools, possibly at the beginning of 2007.

Achievement and standards

The school's results in the 2005 national tests at Key Stage 1 were poor: they were much lower than in 2004 and the pupils' average points score was well below the national figure.

The results at Key Stage 2 in 2005 present a mixed picture. The percentage of pupils gaining the target Level 4 was 68 in English, 79 in mathematics and 84 in science. The score in mathematics was an improvement on 2004, science remained much the same and the result in English declined.

Overall the Year 6 pupils who took the tests in 2005 made average progress during Key Stage 2. However, the small number of girls fared much better than the boys.

Action has been taken in each of the subjects in need of improvement. Work scrutinies have been carried out in English and mathematics, and pupils have individual targets. Staff have received training and common approaches have been agreed, for instance over the teaching of calculation in mathematics. Sixteen laptop computers have been purchased and these have been timetabled for use by each class.

The school has established a thorough system to track each pupil's progress in English and mathematics. This is enabling extra help to be targeted towards particular pupils, such as those in Year 6 on the threshold of Level 4. On the strength of what is being achieved, the school believes that its targets for 2006 should be reached and that the pupils' performance in national tests at both key stages should be better than it was in 2005. This was reflected in the work in classes, particularly in the way Year 6 pupils coped with long multiplication and the analysis of data in mathematics. Year 4 and 5 pupils also showed good basic skills in using computers to search for historical information on the internet. Overall, the pupils' standards and their progress were stronger at Key Stage 2 than in the younger classes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- improve standards in all subjects, especially English, mathematics and information and communication technology – **satisfactory**

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' were well behaved, interested in work and keen to do well. They were quick to follow the good routines that have been established in classes, for instance in gathering equipment and giving their attention to the teacher. Relationships are good, and based on mutual respect. The pupils readily cooperate and show enjoyment in what they do; playtimes were settled social occasions. These attributes contribute considerably to the progress that the pupils make in lessons.

Assembly was a thought-provoking orderly occasion, which promoted a strong sense of community and care for each other.

Attendance for the year to date has been 94.3%, which is similar to the national average, and there have been no exclusions.

Under the leadership of the deputy headteacher, much is being done to promote healthy eating, with prominent displays in classrooms and fruit prepared for breaktimes. Other initiatives that involve the pupils taking responsibility include the school council, supervising entrances at breaktime, and the pupils' ready understanding of their individual targets.

Quality of provision

Action taken to improve the match of work to the pupils' needs has included checks on planning, grouping pupils by ability and booster classes for Year 6. Parents are being drawn into this area for improvement through workshops, and Year 5 pupils have attended sessions at Dearne High School on information and communication technology.

There have been some updates to curriculum guidance, and links are beginning to be made between subjects such as art and history. Provision is enhanced by a good number of additional events and visits, for example to Caphouse Colliery. The beginning of the morning is well used to set the tone for the day's work ahead. Pupils settle instantly to valuable short tasks related to basic skills, and complete a good deal in a short time while the register is taken.

The quality of teaching was good in five lessons, satisfactory in one and inadequate in one. The teaching was consistently good at Key Stage 2. This is an improved picture when compared with September, and reflects the hard work of the teachers in responding to training and advice.

Most of the lessons benefited from detailed planning, based on well-judged learning objectives that were shared with the pupils. The tasks were well prepared and set at different levels according to the needs of the pupils, including the more able. Firm routines helped to maintain a brisk pace and the teachers' secure subject knowledge underpinned high expectations. The concluding parts of the lessons

were well used to check how much the pupils had gained and to set the scene for the next stages of learning.

The satisfactory and inadequate lessons suffered from: activities that lacked sufficient purpose resulting in a lack of progress at times; weaknesses in organisation; and a mismatch of some of the work in relation to the pupils' attainment. More generally, the classroom assistants made a strong contribution to the learning, but some were underemployed when the class was being taught as a whole.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- accelerate pupils' progress in learning throughout the school by improving the match of work to pupils' needs, especially the more able, and establishing a broad and balanced curriculum which meets requirements – **satisfactory**
- raise the quality of teaching to a consistently good standard through rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation - **satisfactory**

Leadership and management

Roles and responsibilities have been reviewed and brought in line with the structure for performance management. A senior team has been established and a co-ordinator for Key Stage 2 has been appointed. Senior staff have received support and are taking a fuller part in the school's development. The senior team has only just begun to meet, but its agenda has been appropriate to the school's priorities.

There are detailed plans to guide the key aspects of the school's work, as well as supporting plans for the foundation subjects. The headteacher has maintained a strong focus on school improvement, with a growing sense of teamwork among the staff.

There has been an appropriate range of monitoring and evaluation. This has included work scrutinies, checks on planning, analyses of pupils' progress and lesson observations. These activities have provided the school with an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its progress. With help from the LA, several senior staff have observed lessons and provided their colleagues with feedback, including areas for development. They have also been able to follow up suggestions by working alongside teachers to improve aspects of practice. The school's monitoring and evaluation have been thorough; they now need to become part of a yearly programme for checking performance, one that also defines the role of the governors in this respect.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- establish the roles and responsibilities of senior teachers and subject leaders– **satisfactory**

External support

The LA's statement of action complements the school's plans and describes an appropriate range of support. There are suitable arrangements for monitoring progress, partly through a specific group, though there is some lack of quantified targets. The LA judges that there is no need to exercise its additional powers at this stage. The LA has fulfilled its commitments to the school; the work of consultants and inspectors has been much welcomed by the school and well targeted at its needs.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– **satisfactory**

Quality of LA's statement of action - **satisfactory**

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school's priorities remain those identified at the inspection in September 2005.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Executive Director of Education Services for Barnsley, and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

J S Hardwick
H M Inspector