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Mrs P Wade  
Acting Headteacher  
St Austin's Catholic Primary School  
Heath Street  
St Helens  
Merseyside  
WA9 5NJ

Dear Mrs Wade

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

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Mr Stephen Wall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 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 acting headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, the consultant headteacher, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the archdiocese and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

### **Context**

The LA and archdiocese are continuing discussions with the governors of St Austin's and another local catholic primary school about plans for the future

of both schools. An additional foundation governor has been designated by the archdiocese. The school has reviewed its support arrangements for Year 6 and has recently redirected their additional teacher support to Year 3. The school has a full intake of 30 pupils in September 2006.

### **Achievement and standards**

As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, the effective tracking of pupils' progress and the school's successful strategies to support pupils, inroads have been made into improving the rate of progress and standards in Key Stages 1 and 2.

The school's assessments, which have been externally moderated, show that currently 84% of pupils in Year 2 are achieving Level 2 or better in reading and 86% in writing. These are improvements on the previous year's figures. However, few pupils are achieving the higher Level 3, particularly in writing and mathematics.

The outcome of the national tests for pupils in Year 6 is not yet known. Nonetheless the school's assessments indicate that the results in English are likely to be similar or a little below last year's very good results, although many fewer pupils are likely to achieve Level 5 in writing than did so last year. In mathematics the assessments indicate the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 will increase, although the numbers achieving Level 5 will remain the same. In science similar improvements at Level 4 are predicted although the numbers of pupils achieving Level 5 is expected to be lower.

Inspectors' observations of lessons confirm that overall the rate of pupils' progress is increasing. However, they also endorse that there is a lack of challenge for some of the more able pupils.

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

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 - **satisfactory progress**

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

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a high order, reflecting the catholic ethos and values at the heart of the school. Pupils have a good sense of right and wrong and are respectful to their peers and adults who work with them. They make a good start in the Foundation Stage, where they learn to work and play harmoniously. Pupils generally behave well and are courteous and polite, although their enthusiastic approach to school can sometimes lead to boisterousness. They enjoy coming to school and attendance levels are satisfactory. Pupils feel safe and are confident that teachers deal with any problems promptly. 'I used to get bullied but I told the teacher and it was sorted straight away,' said one Year 6 pupil. Provision for physical education and sports, both on the timetable and as enrichment activities, are good. This, combined with the emphasis the school places on healthy eating and healthy lifestyle, means they understand the importance of staying healthy. Not least through the much-valued student council, pupils are learning to play a responsible role in the development of the school and wider community. Their ability to work well with others and their improving skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are laying firm foundations for their future economic well-being. This is further strengthened by the innovative links the school has established for Year 6 pupils with a local industry.

## **Quality of provision**

The quality of teaching continues to improve and the proportion of good lessons has increased substantially. Lesson planning is good and follows a common format. Planning shows an increasing awareness of the importance of challenging the higher attaining pupils but this is not always put into practice in lessons. Group work and pair work are now well embedded into classroom practice with the result that pupils are starting to learn more independently. Teachers are starting to use the interactive whiteboards well to add variety and interest to lessons. On the few occasions where teaching was less engaging pupils became restless and noisy and the pace of learning dropped accordingly.

Marking of pupils' work is detailed and rigorous but does not consistently identify ways for pupils to improve their work. Data on pupils' progress in the core subjects is gathered, analysed and monitored effectively, ensuring that

the school has a clear picture of the performance of all pupils. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the subsequent actions taken by teachers to meet the needs of those who are underachieving, particularly the more able, are rigorously monitored.

Revisions to the curriculum mean it meets the needs of pupils and statutory requirements. The core subjects receive the recommended time allocation. The school has invested heavily in improving its ICT facilities and, while this is at an early stage of development and some technical problems are still to be overcome, it is starting to have an impact on teaching and learning. Exceptionally, every pupil studies a modern foreign language. The range of enrichment activities has improved greatly and the school is rightly proud of its links with schools abroad.

Care, guidance and support for pupils are very strong. Procedures for child protection, health and safety, accidents and risk analyses for trips are clear and followed by staff. The school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to support children when a need is identified. Appropriate checks are made on all adults who work with the pupils. The school site is safe and secure and it presents a welcoming and stimulating environment for learning through imaginative displays.

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

- Increase proportion of lessons where teaching and learning are good or better - **good progress**
- Ensure policies for assessment are better understood by all staff and are consistently implemented - **satisfactory progress**
- Ensure whole school curriculum meets the needs of all pupils - **good progress**

### **Leadership and management**

The acting headteacher is providing good leadership for the school and she is being supported well by the deputy headteacher and the Key Stage 1 leader. With the assistance of the LA and the consultant headteacher they are tackling the school improvement agenda with determination. Staff teamwork is evident. They are working hard, are keen to improve and are very receptive to guidance and support.

A monitoring policy has been agreed and a helpful time plan has been introduced to systematise the school's monitoring arrangements. The school improvement plan is monitored dutifully and is being used well in prioritising developments. The school's written evaluations of progress have improved and are of good quality, containing evidence of the impact of the school's strategies and initiatives.

The senior leadership team and governing body have been trained as to what constitutes a good lesson and subsequently the senior staff have undertaken lesson observations. Staff are provided with helpful written feedback and this is making a valuable contribution to improving the quality of teaching. However, some written feedbacks provide a clear grade for the lesson whilst others do not.

The acting headteacher has systematically reviewed and agreed job descriptions for all members of staff. Performance management has taken place for the senior leadership team and is planned for the rest of the staff.

The roles of the core curriculum co-ordinators are well defined and they are leading the development of their subjects well. They evaluate the progress of pupils and produce good quality reports on standards, which are presented to the respective link governors. In turn, the link governors prepare reports for the full governing body; this is good practice. The school has sensible plans to develop further the roles of the coordinators of the foundation subjects so that they exert more influence on their subjects across the school.

The governors have an accurate view of the school because of the reports they receive from the coordinators and the acting headteacher. These put them in a good position to challenge and support the school appropriately. They have valued the training they have received from the link adviser.

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

- Senior managers need to systematically monitor new initiatives to make sure that they are leading to measurable school improvement - **good progress**
- Improve the way the school keeps a check on the progress and effectiveness of the actions it introduces - **good progress**

## External support

The LA has made a valuable contribution to the school's improvement. The 'progress group' is fulfilling its role well in providing challenge and guidance. The school's capacity to improve and to stand on its own two feet is increasing rapidly. In response the LA is sensibly adjusting the way it provides support to the school; a consultative role is emerging. The LA has wisely begun to arrange opportunities for staff to visit other schools where there is acknowledged good practice to enable them to have a point of reference as to the quality of provision at St Austin's.

## Main Judgements

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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - **good**

Newly qualified teachers may now be appointed.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that planning in all year groups addresses the needs of the more able pupils and moreover ensure these plans are implemented consistently.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children and Young People's Services for St Helens, and the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

**Eric Craven**  
**H M Inspector**