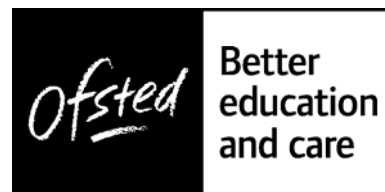


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Mr John Chadburn
The Headteacher
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School
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6 June 2006

Dear Mr Chadburn

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF OUR LADY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Melvyn Hemmings, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 May 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 November 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 headteacher, the chair of governors, some governors and members of the staff team, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority (LA). In light of this evidence Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative from the LA.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in November 2005, staffing has remained the same.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain very low. However, pupils make expected progress in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 are average. However, progress through Key Stage 2 is unsatisfactory and pupils achieve below the expected standards, particularly in mathematics and science. This is because the good practice up to the end of Year 2 is not effectively shared amongst staff to ensure that pupils have carefully planned activities which enable them to develop their knowledge and understanding. However, in the small sample of lessons seen, progress in these across both key stages was at least satisfactory overall. The school is beginning to collect assessment data and, with the help of the LA, staff are beginning to share this information and use it in their planning. An effective example of this was a lesson in which the teacher had clearly identified the levels at which all pupils were working and had carefully matched activities. This ensured that all pupils were appropriately challenged. Although the school has developed a system for tracking pupils it is not effectively shared with pupils and parents. Links are not sufficiently developed between the tracking process and pupils' assessment books and what pupils can demonstrate they can do. So, subject leaders do not have a clear view of what a pupil has to do to complete a level and ensure this is effectively shared with staff. In consequence in some lessons higher attaining and middle attaining pupils do not have work which is sufficiently matched to their potential. This slows their progress. However, the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory because assessment information from their individual education plans (IEPs) is used to carefully match work to their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development remains satisfactory. Pupils have good attitudes to their learning and say they enjoy coming to school. Their spiritual, moral and social understandings are good. Most pupils behave well. However, some older pupils' behaviour in lessons can distract others. Pupils understand the need for a healthy lifestyle. The school council gives pupils an effective say in the life of the school.

Quality of provision

There have been improvements in teaching and learning and both are now satisfactory overall. Teachers have worked hard to incorporate into lessons the skills acquired during the intensive training programme provided by the LA. As a result, there is less use of worksheets as a method of recording for older pupils.

Marking is more regular and useful comments on work are beginning to help pupils to improve their performance. Teaching and learning remain strong in the Nursery and Reception classes and enable children to make good

progress. However, through the rest of the school progress slows as the proportion of good teaching is less.

The best lessons are planned effectively so that teaching appropriately challenges pupils of all abilities. The activities are stimulating and pupils are given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. In satisfactory lessons there is too much teacher direction which hampers pupils' developing their thinking skills effectively. Introductions tend to be overlong so that pupils do not have sufficient time to finish the activity. Too many lessons are slow paced and so some pupils lose interest and their behaviour distracts others. Teaching and learning in science remain a weakness. Although pupils are now given more practical work the activities lack sufficient structure to develop pupils' investigational skills effectively.

There is still work to done to improve the consistency of teaching throughout the school and to increase the amount of good teaching, particularly for older pupils.

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

- ensure teachers make better use of assessment information to plan lessons and help pupils understand how they can improve – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate. There has continued to be insufficient urgency in implementing strategies to address the key issues. Shortcomings in the headteacher's leadership and management that were identified in the last inspection remain. The senior leadership team has not sufficiently focused on the priorities for improvement and, as a result, too many developments have been started but have not been fully embedded. Monitoring is insufficiently focused and no clear baselines have been established upon which progress can be measured. The monitoring process does not clearly link to the aspects identified in the school improvement plan. In addition, the good practice in the school has not been clearly identified, valued and shared. For example the effective monitoring in Key Stage 1 has identified and built on teachers' good practice, thus staff have felt valued. However, in Key Stage 2 staff are unclear about the effective practices elsewhere in the school. Subject coordinators are only just beginning to effectively monitor their subjects. They now have a clearer view of strengths and weaknesses but they have had insufficient opportunities to develop and implement their findings thus they have had little impact on teaching and learning.

The school's improvement plan has been amended in the light of the key issues. However, it does not adequately link activities to measurable outcomes. Small steps for improvement are not included so progress cannot

be clearly identified. Their absence impedes performance management processes.

Governance remains weak. Whilst governors are supportive and keen to play their part in developing the school, the information provided to them has not enabled them to have a clear view of the progress the school has made. As a consequence they cannot effectively hold the senior leadership to account.

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

- ensure the headteacher and senior leadership team check agreed ways of working are implemented and then rigorously evaluated for their effectiveness – inadequate
- ensure the headteacher and senior managers evaluate more carefully and governors question more thoroughly, the reasons for variation in pupils' progress from one year to the next to identify more effectively strengths and weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum – inadequate
- introduce more effective systems to ensure that teaching is providing a suitable level of challenge for all pupils particularly in mathematics and science – inadequate.

External support

Since the section 5 inspection the local authority has committed considerable additional resources to the school. The school development adviser knows the school well. He has the confidence of the staff. The support package is tailored well to the priorities for improvement.

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. The statement meets the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) requirements. It is well structured and is closely aligned with the school's key areas for improvement. The plan clearly links to the support that the school had received before the section 5 inspection and this ensures continuity. The timeline is appropriate and success criteria are clearly stated. The LA's target date for the removal of special measures is realistic.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed without prior approval of HMI.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the school improvement plan identifies small steps for improvement that are measurable.

- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is rigorous and identifies and promotes the sharing of good practice.
- Ensure that assessment information and evaluations of pupils' progress are shared with all staff and governors.

Additional priority

Ensure that all key issues are urgently addressed in order that the school can make sufficient progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
H M Inspector