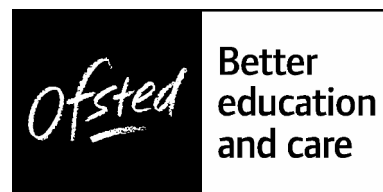


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Mrs S Adcock
The Headteacher
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School
Watkin Street
Fenton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire

29 March 2007

Dear Mrs Adcock

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

Introduction

Following my visit with Fiona Robinson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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, assistant headteacher, subject coordinators, special needs coordinator (SENCO), groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

Following the second monitoring visit there have been some changes in staffing. The new headteacher has now taken up post as has the new curriculum leader responsible for mathematics at Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

School data indicates that standards at the end of both key stages, with the exception of writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, are predicted to be lower than in 2006, and with the exception of mathematics, pupils have made insufficient progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2.

Tracking data enables the school to make its predictions for pupils' attainment at the end of each key stage. At Key Stage 1 the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 and above is predicted to be lower than it was in 2006 and in 2005. However, the progress pupils were observed to make in lessons was satisfactory. There are now more pupils on the register of special educational needs (SEN) with learning difficulties and disabilities in both Key Stage 1 and at the end of Key Stage 2. The school's data suggests that pupils' progress in English is likely to be below the target. However, in mathematics it will be at least satisfactory as it will be in science. The school's monitoring shows there has been recent accelerated progress especially at the end of Key Stage 2.

The school data indicates that some pupils on occasions make better than satisfactory progress. Inspectors judge from their observations that most teaching is satisfactory, but the amount of good teaching seen is increasing.

The school has correctly identified barriers to boys' achievement and resources have been purchased to address this.

Personal development and well-being

Since the inspection in November 2005, the school has worked effectively to improve pupils' personal development and well-being. There have been no exclusions since the headteacher started at the school and the improvement in behaviour noted at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Most pupils are interested in their work and are keen to come to school. Attendance levels are above average and pupils are punctual. Behaviour is good overall in lessons and around the school. Some pupils' behaviour is not as good as others. There are times when some pupils are distracted or lose motivation. Their behaviour is dealt with well by the staff and does not affect the learning of the others.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and know how to keep safe. They have a good sense of community in the school and are successful in fundraising. Older pupils enjoy taking care of the younger pupils. In particular, Year 6 pupils show care and concern for Reception pupils. Children in the Foundation Stage have many valuable opportunities to share their feelings and ideas and make good progress in building up their personal and social skills. Older pupils' preparation for the next stage of learning and future life, although improving, still shows some weaknesses in respect of literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Most of the teaching seen was satisfactory with an increased amount of good lessons, especially in the Foundation Stage. On the rare occasion when inadequate teaching was seen, this was because there was insufficient challenge in extending the thinking of pupils and the activities were not matched to the pupils' capabilities. In the most effective lessons, questioning was used successfully to help pupils to think for themselves. There was a good balance of adult led and child led activities for the youngest pupils and activities were interesting and challenging. In some lessons, however, teachers talked for too long and this limited the time for pupils to develop their understanding in their independent work.

Teachers' plans usually state clearly what pupils are expected to learn and how and when the learning is to be undertaken. The learning objectives do not always show the different outcomes for pupils working at different National Curriculum levels and so do not relate to pupils' individual learning targets. There are good classroom displays, some of which help pupils to identify the level at which they are working, and their next steps for learning. Teachers regularly mark work in English and mathematics. However, this is not always the case in science. In the best examples of marking, teachers provide useful comments that help pupils understand how to improve. Pupils with learning difficulties often receive good support from the teaching assistants. The assistants work most effectively when pupils are in small groups and can support these pupils appropriately at the start and end of lessons.

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

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

Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher has a clear and comprehensive vision for the school. The senior leadership team has been augmented by the recently appointed coordinator for mathematics. The assistant headteacher still has a heavy work load which, combined with her classroom responsibilities, restricts her opportunities for monitoring teaching and learning. The team is relatively inexperienced but enthusiastic and keen to make improvements. It has not had sufficient time, as yet, to demonstrate an improved capacity to bring about improvements. Data handling is developing and becoming more rigorous in its application. However, it is not understood, so not used, by some of the teachers in the classroom. This is limiting their development of a robust understanding of the school's position. The lack of a performance management policy is hindering the development of middle managers. The school's process of self-evaluation does not sufficiently involve all staff, pupils,

parents and governors. They are therefore unclear about the overall priorities for the school and their role in achieving them. The lack of a school improvement plan also impedes the sharing of strategic vision. The raising achievement plan provides managers with an adequate overview of teaching but it does not have sufficiently incremental targets to help teachers to take the next step to improve.

The role of middle managers is not developed enough to ensure their accountability. The managers do not have a firm understanding of data apart from the school's own tracking systems. This limits their understanding of the progress the whole school is making towards achieving its targets. There is insufficient identification and sharing of good teaching and assessment. There is an urgent need for staff who can model good practice and mentor colleagues.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors have begun training to ensure they have a clear understanding of their role in the school and how to fulfil it. All governors now have an area of responsibility to monitor.

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 – satisfactory
- introduce more effective systems to ensure that teaching is providing a suitable level of challenge for all pupils particularly in mathematics and science – good.

External support

The local authority continues to have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has used this information to tailor support to the school. Support for the newly qualified teacher is good and has enabled her to make good progress. The school remains very dependent upon the support from the local authority.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Tracking and the use of assessment information to impact fully on classroom practice and the raising of standards.
- Ensure that the best practice in teaching in mathematics is reflected in the teaching of reading and writing.
- Develop the strengths of subject coordinators and their involvement in strategic planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
H M Inspector