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6 June 2007

Mrs Adcock  
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School  
Watkin Street  
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Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST4 4NP

Dear Mrs Adcock

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School

## Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 June 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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), a lunchtime supervisor, groups of pupils, a parent, the chair of governors and other members of the governing body and two representatives from the Local Authority (LA).

## Context

Following the third monitoring visit there have been no changes in staffing.

## Achievement and standards

Recent school data indicate that standards at the end of Key Stage 2 remain too low. Mathematics is broadly in line to achieve its end of Key Stage 2 target for this year, science is just below its target, English is well below. Progress for the Year 6 pupils from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is therefore inadequate.

Nevertheless, in Year 6 school tracking shows that some pupils have made good progress of two or three sub levels since Easter. As a result although the number of pupils expected to gain level 4+ is lower than the previous year, there is a significant increase in the proportion of pupils predicted to gain level 5; a quarter of Year 6 pupils are in line for level 5 in 2007. Monitoring of the support provided in mathematics and science tests for those pupils who were weaker readers indicates that this will have enabled them to perform better.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are above national and are higher than the previous year's. Identification of reading as a whole school development focus has led to improvements in reading standards in the lessons observed. In reception the use of Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) has increased pupils' confidence in reading and the majority are now at the expected level for their age. These developments have been carried into Years 1 and 2 with consequent improvement in reading skills.

The school's tracking data is now being used by all staff and this has improved the progress made by pupils in lessons. Progress made by pupils seen in lessons is now satisfactory overall. However, where challenge and support is well planned teachers identify strategies which accelerate pupils' progress. Those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in both key stages make good progress.

As noted in the previous visit, boys' achievement relative to girls is weaker. Work has been carried out to reduce the difference in boys' and girls' progress. Pupils have been asked for their views on what helped them most and teachers have identified a range of activities that help to make lessons more active. As a result, pupils are sustaining a livelier interest in classroom work and have grown in confidence in answering questions. Improved selection of texts for boys to read has given a better balance between non fiction and fiction. This has encouraged more boys to read.

## Personal development and well-being

The good standard of personal development and well-being seen in the school in the last visit has been maintained, with some improvement. Behaviour in classrooms is good and often better throughout the school. Pupils enjoy their learning, have good attendance and are polite and respectful to each other and adults. They like school,

describing it as 'amazing', 'fabulous' and 'happy', and can think of hardly anything they would like to improve, other than the provision of more replacement footballs. There is still the odd pupil who misbehaves, but this is not often, and is dealt with well by school staff. Many pupils have a good knowledge of healthy eating and the value of exercise. A number choose salads at lunch times, but others say that they 'sometimes eat too many sugary and fried things which are not good for us'. They are proud of the successes they have in competitive sports against other schools, especially the girls' football team. As a result of these opportunities, many pupils are developing good teamwork skills. This is helping to improve their preparation for their next stage of learning and economic well-being, although there still remain some weaknesses in literacy and numeracy skills which also relate to their future.

### Quality of provision

Teaching and learning, in both the Foundation Stage and the main school is satisfactory overall, with a number of good features. There has been a steady improvement in teaching in the last few months, which is now accelerating, and leading to better learning throughout the school. No inadequate teaching was seen. Teaching has improved because there is more consistency in lesson planning, and teachers are identifying learning objectives clearly. The needs of most pupils are being met more successfully because accurate assessment data is collected and tracking of pupil progress is in place across the school. Information is understood and used by teachers much more effectively than in the past. Teachers are more confident in providing more adventurous and ambitious learning experiences for their pupils. This is evidenced by more 'hands-on' practical opportunities, such as pupils in Year 4 learning about the lives of Roman gladiators. As a result, pupils are enjoying their learning, and achieving better. Teaching is more challenging and teachers have raised their expectations for the achievement of pupils. This has also boosted the progress made by most pupils. Marking is now being used consistently in all classes to celebrate pupils' work and to guide them to their next learning steps.

The results of the monitoring of teaching are shared. This has enabled teachers to identify where they can improve and this is closely matched to support through professional development. Subject leaders in English, mathematics and science are involved much more in the evaluation of teaching and learning and this enables them to contribute well to improvement in teaching practice.

Less successful learning is still sometimes evident when teachers keep pupils too long on the carpet, when they are eager to start their tasks. Not all teachers are yet fully confident in differentiating the work for individual pupils, although work is planned for groups of pupils with different ability levels. Questioning by teachers is variable in quality. Some encourage pupils to answer in whole sentences but others still require one word answers only. The management is aware of this and is prioritising speaking by pupils for improvement. Worksheets are still being used more often than necessary and the school is appropriately targeting writing as another

area for improvement. Teachers are beginning to develop writing across other areas of the curriculum, but this is not yet consistent in all classes.

Teaching assistants are being used effectively to support and improve the learning of pupils. They are particularly successful in their work with those pupils with special educational needs.

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 – good.

### Leadership and management

As noted in the previous visit the headteacher is showing strong leadership. She is ably supported by her senior leadership team. They have improved the whole school ethos. As a result there is a real 'buzz' to the learning within the school. The school now feels a happy place where pupils enjoy learning. The school is able to evaluate itself accurately. This is because the senior leadership team has embarked on an effective monitoring programme. It has clearly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Good practice is identified and shared. All the staff are participating in developing the school's strengths.

The lack of performance management which was hindering the development of middle managers has been addressed. They are now confident about what is expected of them and are thus able to make their contribution to school improvement. They are willing to take a lead in working alongside colleagues. This has led to an improvement in lesson planning and in particular in ensuring that work is carefully matched to different groups of pupils' needs. This has been supported by teachers' improved understanding of pupil progress data.

The school was able to demonstrate its improved capacity for leading new developments and staff training on the recent whole school training day. This was effectively led by the senior team. The focus of the day was on developing the school's vision for itself. All school staff took part together with some governors and parents. As a result all staff, from lunchtime supervisors to teaching assistants, now have ownership of the school's vision and are working together to achieve it.

The school has been proactive in attracting extra funding and this is gradually improving resources such as the new Community Learning Centre and the purchase of 'Huff and Puff' equipment which will make playtimes more interesting and active. Pupils have opportunities to take responsibility through such things as play leadership. Lunchtimes have been reorganised. They are now much calmer with minimum queuing. Pupils eat together on a table with others from different year groups. Lunch time is appropriately used to develop pupils' skills of cooperation with one another and to provide a calm start to the afternoon.

Governance continues to be satisfactory. Governors are loyal to the school and are more confident in questioning reports and holding senior managers to account. Every subject now has a link governor to act as a critical friend. Appropriate training has been provided to strengthen this role. A trial run, ahead of the new school year, has taken place with three link governors. This has enabled the governors to roll out this work from September with a follow up visit towards the end of the term. Thus governors plan to gather first hand evidence of the impact of the school's work. A regular agenda item has been included in full governing body meetings to ensure that all governors are informed of progress towards targets in the action plan.

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 – good
- 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 – good
- 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 support the school and has an accurate and clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This information is used well to target and monitor the support provided. The newly qualified teacher continues to develop her professional understanding and is able to contribute well to the school's overall improvement. The school is becoming less dependant on the support from the local authority.

### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Develop differentiation so that not only are groups of pupils are catered for, but individual pupils are appropriately challenged.

- Develop teachers' skills in modelling writing across the curriculum so that pupils have increased opportunities to develop their skills.
- Improve teachers' use of questioning so that pupils explain their thinking and teachers are clear about pupils' learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker HMI  
H M Inspector