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19 November 2007

Mr C Sweeney  
The Headteacher  
The Priory School  
Pickeridge Close  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA2 7HW

Dear Mr Sweeney

#### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 November 2007, 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 December 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Second visit: Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall  
Additional Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 7 and 8 November 2007

### Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. Discussions were held with a group of pupils.

### Context

There have been considerable changes to staffing since the last visit and four new staff have been appointed. A new deputy headteacher is due to start after Christmas. As a result, the school now has a full complement of teachers.

### Achievement and standards

The results from the end of year examinations in GCSE and Entry level qualifications show that whilst pupils gained accreditation there were too many subject areas where they did not achieve well enough. In GCSEs, for example, the vast majority of pupils did not gain above an E grade, although in physical education three pupils gained a D pass and one pupil gained a C in art and design.

Although pupils' achievements remain unsatisfactory, pupils are beginning to make better progress in their work. This is because teaching is gradually improving. Pupils like the fact that there are different groups for reading and feel their reading is improving. There are, however, too many pupils who are reluctant to write and the lack of encouragement by teachers for pupils to put pen to paper in lessons other than English prevents them from making the progress they should.

A start has been made on developing systems for assessing the progress pupils make, but there is still a long way to go. Teachers are beginning to assess pupils' work against National Curriculum levels and some are beginning to predict what pupils should achieve by the end of the academic year. Not all teachers have the confidence yet to do this. Where predictions have been made these do not always take into consideration the varying ability of the pupils and, in some cases, expectations are not high enough. A few staff have started to set targets to help pupils to achieve the predicted levels but these are not sufficiently focused on pupils' learning and are not yet shared with pupils. The school recognises that once staff are clear about what pupils know, understand and can do, it will then be possible to set effective targets to help pupils to make the progress they should.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006:

- improve the achievement of all pupils setting challenging targets and regularly assessing each pupil's progress – inadequate.

## Personal development and well-being

Much has been achieved in establishing systems for managing behaviour that are beginning to have a positive impact. As a result, the school is now a safe and calm place to be. Pupils comment that behaviour is better around the school and feel that the new detention system is helping them to behave. In lessons, pupils value the points system that recognises their efforts and several are able to say what they should be given and why they perhaps should not have the full allocation of points. This, together with the fact that teachers now talk more to pupils about their attitudes during lessons, is a major improvement since the last visit. The number of exclusions has increased, but this is mostly because of the school's appropriately hard line on smoking. There are far fewer temporary exclusions for behaviour problems, now about two a week, although the school recognises that these need reducing further.

Many pupils now have a far more settled approach to lessons. Even though at times they become disruptive, most will stay in the classroom and come back on task after a while. A real improvement has been in the way that pupils are no longer influenced by others who come into the classroom to interrupt lessons. An example of this occurred in a Year 10 science lesson when a pupil came in to disrupt the class. No one took any notice and one pupil shook his head and tutted at the behaviour of his peer.

Attendance is still too low but is slowly improving. It has taken time for pupils to adjust to the no smoking policy and some have struggled to attend. However, more are appreciating the new opportunities offered within the curriculum and the school is aiming for a 75% attendance rate within the next six months.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006

- improve the behaviour of pupils in all areas of the school by implementing the new behaviour management systems consistently so that pupils know what is expected of them – satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

Pupils feel that teaching has got a lot better. They like the fact that they know what they are going to do in lessons and feel lessons are a lot more interesting. Much of this is down to the fact that teachers are planning their lessons more effectively. They ensure that pupils know what they will do in lessons and many talk to pupils at the end of the lesson about what they have learnt. However, not all teachers make clear to pupils what skills they will learn and, at times, the objectives for learning can be too broad such as 'complete tasks'. This makes it difficult at the end of the lesson for pupils to be clear about what they have learnt.

Teachers do not yet match tasks to the wide range of pupils' abilities. Pupils are often set the same task regardless of their ability and, consequently, many cannot achieve the tasks without help or find the work too easy. In many lessons, teaching assistants are not used effectively enough. Teachers are now managing pupils' behaviour a lot better, but they have not considered how to make better use of

teaching assistants to support learning. For example, opportunities are missed for them to work with small groups of individuals.

Through the development of links with local colleges and other providers, the school is beginning to put in place a far better curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils. Although this is not yet fully established, pupils are aware of the opportunities that are opening up for them and are enthusiastic, for example about the chance to do a course in motor mechanics. Work experience is also being developed with a better focus on meeting the needs of pupils.

The procedures for the care and welfare of pupils are improving. The tutor system is fully established and tutors play an active role in working with their groups, such as in supporting them to complete detentions and discussing their behaviour. The new approach to detentions for misdemeanours has been very effective and the majority of pupils are responding well to it. The school has worked hard with pupils to help them stop smoking and, whilst this has resulted in more exclusions and absence, it is beginning to make progress in reducing smoking. A number of strategies to support pupils' emotional well-being, including counselling and mentoring, are providing positive support, as is the presence of an educational psychologist one day a week.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils enjoy lessons and come to school more regularly – satisfactory.

### Leadership and management

The progress made in the leadership of the school is good. The increase in staffing levels is enabling the senior management team to have more time to look strategically at what needs to be done. The revised school improvement plan is far better focused on key areas and has ensured staff are clear about what needs to be done. There is now a more realistic understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the school. Monitoring is now more rigorous and is beginning to have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. As yet, the school does not have a system for collating the information it will gather to enable it to analyse and improve pupils' achievements, although an appropriate plan is in place to address this.

Staff are developing their management roles, but this is still at an early stage. Subject managers do not yet have a clear understanding of how to manage their areas or how to plan for improvements.

Staff have pulled together as a team and the commitment to bring about improvements is very evident. There are many strengths amongst the team and the school recognises that the many instances of good practice need to be expanded and used across the school, such as the use of portfolios of work in food technology and opportunities for self-evaluation in French.

The governing body has improved its role in supporting the school and is looking at different ways to monitor the school's work. It is very clear about what needs to be

done and is beginning to fulfil its role in providing challenge to the senior management team.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006:

- improve the way the school is well led and managed by sharing responsibilities more widely and implementing clear systems for monitoring the school's work – satisfactory.

#### External support

The high level of support for the school from the local authority has contributed greatly to the improvements over the last six months. The good working relationships and realistic expectations at all levels have enabled the school to move forward. Staff very much value the support they are getting and speak highly of the advice provided by consultants. The local authority's supportive action, in reducing the number of new pupils the school admits and in managing the school's finances, has enabled senior managers to concentrate more effectively on the key areas for improvement.

Planning for the new school building is in the process of being finalised. The decision to wait until the school is in a settled position to cope with the upheaval of various moves is appropriate.