

31 January 2008

Mrs R Blakemore  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Wheatland Lane  
Wallasey  
Merseyside  
CH44 7ED

Dear Mrs Blakemore

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

Following my visit with Peter E Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 January 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children's Services of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection: 29 and 30 January 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority (LA), including the school's improvement partner.

### Context

Since the last inspection one temporary teacher has left the school. Two classes are taught by temporary staff, one on account of illness.

### Achievement and standards

The standards achieved by pupils in the most recent statutory assessments were covered in detail in the last monitoring letter. Pupils enter the school with levels of skills and abilities that are below average and in some cases well below. Currently, pupils in the Foundation Stage are making satisfactory progress and some are making good progress. They make strong progress in their personal development but less good progress in numeracy and language skills. The school has introduced measures that are beginning to accelerate the progress the pupils make in literacy and numeracy. On entry to Year 1, pupils' levels of ability are generally below that expected for their age group.

In 2007, pupils in Key Stage 1 attained standards that were significantly below average. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils are now making good progress overall in this key stage. In Key Stage 2, pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 3, 4 and 5. Pupils' progress accelerates in Year 6 and data provided by the school indicate that these pupils are on course to meet their targets. Assessment information also suggests that a greater proportion of pupils will achieve the higher Level 5 in their National Curriculum assessments, particularly in English and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress overall and some make good progress. They are well supported by a number of specifically devised programmes of work and by skilled teaching assistants.

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory and improving. Pupils say that their enjoyment of lessons has increased, as teachers have introduced more opportunities to use computers and interactive whiteboards. There are good relationships between adults and pupils; behaviour is satisfactory around school and often good in lessons. Pupils say they feel safe. In the playground, most are respectful of the need to treat each other with tolerance and respect. The new 'house system' has given pupils a greater sense of belonging and purpose. It also

has provided more opportunities for them to develop a healthy sense of competition and service to the community. The school council continues to develop its role and all Year 6 pupils are now expected to undertake some position of responsibility to help the school. Pupils' attendance remains below average and was exacerbated by an outbreak of illness during the autumn term. The school continues to work closely with parents and the LA to improve attendance.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has been maintained since the previous monitoring inspection and remains satisfactory overall. The Foundation Stage environment has been improved and the standard of displays in classrooms and communal areas has also risen. The timetable has been revised to provide a sharper focus on literacy and numeracy and to drive up standards in these subjects. Pupils' day-to-day progress is being more effectively recorded to give the school a more informed picture of their learning and the progress they are making. These measures are beginning to have an impact, but there is still more to do. In Key Stage 1, pupils benefit from consistently good teaching and they make steady progress as a result. In Key Stage 2, some recent instability in staffing has had an adverse effect on the progress of some pupils. Nevertheless, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and pupils' progress accelerates considerably in Year 6, where teaching is consistently good. Teachers' confidence in the use of assessment data continues to grow and systems for target-setting and for tracking the progress made by pupils are more firmly embedded. A consequence of this is that pupils know the National Curriculum levels they are working at and their targets much more thoroughly. Their understanding of what they need to do to improve their work has also improved, partly through the use of displays which give pupils guidance on how to improve their writing.

Teaching is best when there is a close match between the individual pupil's ability and the work he or she is asked to do in lessons. Lesson planning takes this into account, but in a minority of lessons the work set is too hard or too easy for some pupils. Pupils themselves have commented on their teachers' improved expertise in information and communication technology (ICT) and their enthusiasm for introducing new strategies into their lessons after attending training courses. In the best lessons learning is fun, but there are high expectations of work and behaviour and a sense of partnership. Routines are well established. Discussion is encouraged and pupils of all abilities feel confident about voicing an answer. Resources for learning are of good quality and classroom management ensures the different parts of the lesson join together seamlessly. Praise and reward are used well to keep pupils motivated and engaged. Satisfactory teaching is characterised by a slower pace and a reluctance to provide enough opportunities for pupils to work independently. This has particular significance for the progress of the most able pupils. Teaching assistants are becoming skilled in delivering effective teaching and support to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The training they have received from a local special school and in national strategies, such as Wave 3, are improving pupils' learning.

There have been appropriate improvements to the academic guidance pupils receive. A new assessment policy has been introduced. One effective element of this is the 'tickled pink' and 'room to grow' approach to marking. This has proved popular with pupils as it gives them a very clear idea of where they have succeeded as well as providing advice on the next steps they must take in their learning.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

### Leadership and management

Since the last inspection the headteacher, ably assisted by her deputy headteacher, has continued to provide clear direction for the school's steady improvement. Their determination to improve the school is reflected in a more rapid pace of change than was seen at previous monitoring visits. A stronger sense of purpose and teamwork is evident in the school and staff are increasingly focused on how to improve standards, teaching and learning. For example, both whole-staff and departmental meetings now regularly include opportunities for teachers to share and discuss good practice. A sign of the school's growing confidence in its ability to improve is its more robust approach to the setting of challenging statutory targets which are now shared with all staff. This has further increased the understanding amongst staff that all are responsible for improvement. Staff are also being held more to account for their work. The headteacher now meets with all teachers regularly to review the progress made by pupils in their class.

Appropriate steps have been taken to deal with some recent instability in staffing. A permanent appointment to fill a teaching vacancy in Key Stage 2 has been made. Identified weaknesses in teaching are tackled robustly and effective steps have been taken to improve the quality of teaching. A staff meeting has been held on the characteristics of good and outstanding teaching. Following this, improvements were made to the school's teaching and learning policy. A number of teachers and teaching assistants have visited other schools to observe good practice. As well as reporting their findings back to colleagues, teachers have begun to adapt their own practice. Teachers who have attended other training are now required to consider and record carefully how they will apply what they have learned to their teaching. There are apt plans to assess the impact of these improvements on pupils' learning. Other teachers, who are relatively new to their year groups, continue to be supported by experienced colleagues.

Monitoring of lessons is now more embedded in the life of the school. Since the last monitoring inspection all teachers have been observed teaching mathematics by the subject manager for numeracy and a member of the leadership team. Appropriate feedback on the quality of teaching has been given. Consequently, the school has a stronger understanding of the effectiveness of teaching. The results of this monitoring could usefully be collated into a formal summary which would give the school an overview of the quality of its teaching. The school has plans to monitor other core subjects but there is as yet no formal timetable that sets out future monitoring activities for the rest of the academic year.

Subject managers of English, mathematics and science are taking an increasingly prominent role in checking and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in their subject. They scrutinise pupils' work, check teachers' planning and give appropriate and regular verbal and written feedback. As a result, they have a much stronger understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their subject. The roles of subject managers of the foundation subjects and of ICT are in the very early stages of development. Some have audited resources in their areas but they do not yet monitor work in their subjects.

A number of initiatives have been introduced to improve learning. Several staff have attended training designed to promote the greater involvement of pupils in their learning. Useful resources have been purchased to meet the needs of the more able pupils in mathematics, and training has been held on how pupils can be taught to use and apply mathematics more effectively. New arrangements have been introduced in Key Stage 1, so that pupils are taught in ability groups for literacy and numeracy. Although it is too early to fully evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, the school considers that it is improving learning. Changes to the time allocation of subjects in the Foundation Stage mean that there is a much stronger emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and understanding. Recent useful changes have also been made to how pupils' work in this key stage is recorded. This has made it much easier for the school to chart the progress of individual pupils and to assess the impact of the new arrangements for literacy and numeracy. New national reading strategies to improve reading have also been introduced.

Effective steps have also been taken by the school's leadership to ensure that policies are consistently applied. A staff handbook has been introduced which summarises routines and key policies. A homework policy has also been implemented and information has been sent to parents on this. A marking policy and a calculations policy for mathematics have also been implemented. An assessment, reporting and recording policy has also been introduced. A key aspect of this policy is the school-wide method of marking, which informs pupils of what they have achieved and of the next steps they must take to improve their work. Staff have worked hard to ensure its consistent application, which has strengthened pupils' understanding of what it is that they must do to improve.

The school improvement plan has been revised and deadlines have been added to the key areas for improvement. It is now regularly reviewed and evaluated. Action plans drawn up by core subject leaders are included. The plan could usefully be extended to include succinct sections on how foundation subjects and ICT will be developed. The school's leadership has also carried out an appropriate evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Assessment data in the core subjects are collated each term and the school's database has been appropriately updated. This gives the school a more accurate picture of where underachievement lies and enables this to be targeted with suitable strategies. This database could be helpfully combined with other, separate data which show the rates of progress pupils make in each year group. This would give the school a clearer view of the progress individual pupils and different groups of pupils are making.

Links with parents have been strengthened. Questionnaires have been used to ascertain their views, and the frequency of reports to parents about their children's

progress has been increased. Parents of some vulnerable pupils are kept well informed of the progress their children are making through a specific home-to-school diary system. A number of improvements to the school environment have been made. However, a health and safety issue in the playground raised at the previous inspection has yet to be addressed.

Governors continue to develop their role as a 'critical friend' to the school and are steadily increasing their knowledge of the school's work and its effectiveness. Core subject managers have presented information about their areas to governors. Several governors have visited activities in the school and have reported back to the full governing body. However, there is scope for governors to make greater use of comparative assessment data so that they have a broader base of evidence on which to judge the school's performance. Governors have also been involved in statutory target-setting and in the appointment of new staff. A governors' development plan has also been drawn up.

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

- Improve leadership and management so that:
  - the school has clear direction for improvement
  - monitoring ensures that staff at all levels are made accountable for standards and performance – good

#### External support

The LA is providing good support to the school. A school improvement officer visits regularly and funding has been provided for a national improvement strategy. The LA's consultants have also advised and worked alongside core subject leaders in the monitoring of pupils' work. The school's improvement partner has also provided good support for the school in target-setting arrangements and in aspects of performance management. The headteacher is mentored by the headteacher of another school. Good links exist with a local special school.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- No further priorities were identified for the school during this visit.