

7 March 2008

Ms A Loftus
St Peter's Catholic Primary School
Fairbank Road
Newall Green
Manchester
M24 2YS

Dear Ms Loftus

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

Following my visit with Mr McDermott to your school on 5 and 6 March 2008, 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 September 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – 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 and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST PETER'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 5 and 6 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and a number of part-lessons. Inspectors scrutinised documents and work from pupils, met with the headteacher, pupils, subject leaders, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been a period of staffing instability and disruption since the inspection. Three teachers had been at the school for less than a week in September 2007 when it was inspected. One teacher left at Christmas and two more are due to leave at Easter. The LA has decided not to close St Peter's because it is the only Roman Catholic primary school in the area and it plays an important role within the diocese. Increasingly, the school takes pupils of an East European heritage and African heritage who are settling in the area.

Achievement and standards

The school is taking a range of appropriate steps to improve achievement. A more rigorous system of tracking pupils' progress has enabled teachers and senior leaders to have a better understanding of which pupils are making fast enough progress. Additional teaching programmes are used to tackle any group of pupils whose progress is slow or static. Despite these improvements, pupils' achievement is patchy. The school's data from the autumn term shows that a small proportion of pupils have done well and others have made slow progress or have remained at the same level. Across the school, too many pupils are off track to meet their targets, particularly in writing but also in reading and mathematics. In mathematics, around 60% of pupils are on track to meet challenging targets. In comparison, only one in three pupils is on track to meet targets in writing. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning are hindering the acceleration of pupils' progress. Progress is faster in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) and in upper Key Stage 2 classes because teaching is consistently good.

Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that standards are too low. Standards vary across year groups and subjects. In the Foundation Stage, children exceed the early learning goals in communication, language and literacy because there is a good focus on the development of phonics and early reading skills. In tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 2 in 2007, pupils' attainment was too low, particularly in mathematics. Current standards of pupils from Year 2 through to Year 4 remain below average and are not rising quickly enough. Few pupils do well for their age. Writing is a particular concern: a small minority of pupils are reaching or exceeding age-related expectations.

There are signs that standards are rising in upper Key Stage 2 classes. Teachers have a good focus on developing pupils' writing and literacy skills. Pupils' vocabulary and their ability to reason, synthesise and justify their views are improving rapidly. This is because lessons are exciting, discussions are of high quality and teachers have high expectations. In one class, for example, pupils were able to recognise a rhetorical question and understand how and why it is used in persuasive writing. In a Year 5 class, a pupil wrote a letter and used excellent description 'We are conscience stricken about what we did'. Pupils' skills in calculation and in problem solving are improving in Years 4, 5 and 6. The school has very limited data to show current standards in science.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2007:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science for all pupils but particularly for pupils of average and above average ability - inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Pupils' behaviour is good. They report that bullying is rare and that they feel safe and well looked after. They are polite around the school and show respect for each other and for adults, for example by holding doors open without being asked. Pupils listen attentively in class to adults and to their peers. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is founded on a strong Catholic Christian ethos which has a clear focus on fairness and consideration for others. The school has acted on pupils' views and established a support-group strategy for pupils who experience any form of bullying; and a group of pupils to act as 'playground pals' and 'buddies'. New pupils from a range of diverse cultural heritages quickly feel part of the school, helped noticeably by the 'playground pals'.

The rate of attendance remains well below average. The school is working well to improve this situation through a wide range of initiatives and strategies. The headteacher has brought together a very capable team of staff and governors to lead improvements. As a result, attendance has improved by 1.4% overall since September 2007 when compared with the same period in the previous school year. Attendance is highest in Key Stage 2 and is at its lowest for the youngest pupils. The school has worked well with parents and pupils to ensure that they know the benefits of coming to school frequently. Pupils speak convincingly about both the consequences of absence, and the benefits to be gained from good attendance. The school has firm plans to work with parents further to secure better attendance for younger pupils including initiatives such as 'stay and read' and 'stay and do sums'. In this way parents will be able to watch skilled practitioners teaching phonics and mathematics.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2007:

- Involve parents and pupils more effectively to ensure that attendance is improved - satisfactory

Quality of provision

Variability in the quality of teaching lies at the heart of pupils' underachievement. However, although there are still too many inadequate lessons, fewer were observed than at the last inspection. This is because of effective action taken by the headteacher to tackle inadequate teaching and because of good quality teaching and learning by the deputy headteacher which is used as an exemplar for others. Nevertheless, in a significant number of year groups, teaching is not consistently good enough to push forward the pupils' learning. This is because the challenge and expectations for pupils is too low and the pace of learning in lessons too slow, particularly for the more able pupils. The exception is in upper Key Stage 2 where effective teaching ensures that the pace of learning is brisk.

Teachers generally plan lessons diligently including a range of activities. Planning information is shared with learning assistants, who prompt, guide and encourage pupils quietly and ensure that those with learning and language needs play a full part in the lesson. The learning mentor and learning assistants ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable pupils, including those who are not yet fluent in English, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are met sensitively. Teachers have established good environments for learning in their classes. Some exploit the displays and the learning environment to extend pupils' learning and thinking. In one lesson, for example, the teacher referred pupils to the working wall for ideas about good 'ordering words' to use in their persuasive text. She also referred them to some excellent adjectives that the group had devised earlier in order to improve their persuasive writing.

Teachers have a better overview of the current progress made by pupils and the targets that they should reach. In the best lessons, assessment information is used well to plan activities that build pupils' skills and knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. In a number of classes however, assessment information is not used consistently by all teachers to plan lessons that provide suitable challenge to extend pupils' learning. In these lessons, pupils are marking time, or completing low-level activities. Across the school there is an over-reliance on low-level worksheets and this is a hindrance to pupils' rapid progress. Pupils generally know the level that they are working at and the level that they should reach by the end of the year but they are unclear about what they need to do to reach those improved levels. Across the school, teachers' marking and assessment does not ensure that pupils know exactly what they must do to produce better work.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2007:

- Raise the levels of teacher expectation, challenge and pace in lessons to improve the quality of teaching and learning - satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide good leadership. They have a very accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have taken strong action to make improvements to provision. This is now bearing fruit as can be seen in the improved tracking systems and in improved teaching and learning. There are good plans in place to strengthen the teaching team, subject leadership and the school leadership team by the end of the academic year. The quality of subject leadership has improved. Subject leaders have benefited from training and have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, it is difficult to assess the impact of their developing roles because the staff team has yet to stabilise. Subject action plans are in place and leaders have started to monitor teaching and learning by scrutinising and moderating pupils' work and evaluating teachers' planning. co-ordinators of English and mathematics are aware of current standards and how much progress pupils make. However, information available about progress and standards in other subjects is not as detailed.

Staff are jaded after a busy period of support and guidance from different sources. However, this has not dented their determination to improve further and to ensure that pupils achieve better and get the best possible education. They are responding to a number of different improvement plans which, although linking together, diffuse and dilute the school's main priorities for improvement. As a result, staff are sometimes unclear about the exact nature of the points for improvement identified at the last inspection. Some initiatives that the school is working on do not refer directly to the areas for improvement and this detracts from efforts to improve achievement and standards. In essence, the whole-school improvement plan and subject action plans are insufficiently synchronised to ensure that the whole school is moving forward to improve all of the key issues highlighted at the last inspection. Many of the success criteria, lack sharpness and make it difficult for governors and senior leaders to gauge the impact of actions on provision.

Governance has improved since the last inspection. Governors meet monthly to discuss the school's progress against areas for improvement. One governor, for example, has frequent meetings about attendance and is a key member of the attendance team. She reports back regularly to the whole governing body about trends and patterns in attendance as well as the impact that strategies have had on reducing absence. A standing item at every meeting is a discussion about pupils' progress and standards. Governors have made good use of LA support, for example from the human resources team, to tackle inadequate teaching and learning. Governors are now better placed to hold teachers and the school as a whole to account.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2007:

- Ensure subject leaders improve their practice in assessment and evaluation in order to play a more effective role in raising standards - satisfactory

- Ensure that the governing body holds the school's leadership rigorously to account – satisfactory

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External support

The LA has followed its statement of action, with a focus on intensive initial support. The plan has to be read in conjunction with the raising attainment plan. Even so, targets and success criteria are not always sharp or quantifiable enough for senior leaders and the LA to accurately monitor and measure progress over time and to evaluate the impact of its support. The authority's statement of action does not make explicit the timings and milestones that are needed to reflect the rate of improvement in key areas. Teachers and pupils have benefited from support from two advanced skills teachers and from a teacher from the intervention team who joined the staff after a teacher left at Christmas. The support included observing and coaching staff, working with groups of pupils to remediate underachievement and modelling good practice. Consultants in English, mathematics and in the Foundation Stage have contributed to the support to the school. However, the impact of this has not always been as positive as intended because the support has not always been targeted precisely enough to tackle the school's key priorities for improvement. For example, the Foundation Stage was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection with some aspects that were good. Despite the fact that the whole school had a number of significant areas that were inadequate, the school has received over nine days of support for the Foundation Stage. The large amount of initiatives, advice and strategies has sometimes confused staff and this has diluted their impact.