

10 July 2008

Ms A Loftus
Headteacher
St Peter's Catholic Primary School
Firbank Road
Newall Green
Manchester
M23 2YS

Dear Ms Loftus

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

Following my visit with Gill Jones, HMI to your school on 8 and 9 July 2008, 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 September 2007. 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 – 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
HM Inspector

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

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 8 and 9 July 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, pupils, governors, subject leaders and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Two teachers have left the school since the last visit. One class is being taught by a supply teacher. The other class is being taught by an advanced skills teacher provided by the LA for two days a week and by teachers already at the school. The deputy headteacher is leaving at the end of term. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed who will take up her position in September. Teachers have been appointed and will take up their posts in September which means the school will have a full complement of permanent staff.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is improving. More than half of all pupils in Years 4 to 6 have made better than expected progress in reading and mathematics and more than a third have made accelerated progress in writing. The gaps in pupils' learning and skills are increasingly filled as a result of consistently good and outstanding teaching. Since the last visit, the quality of pupils' work has improved; consequently, standards in those year groups are rising and moving closer towards national expectations, particularly in English. Inadequate achievement in some classes is proving harder to shift, partly because of instability in teaching and learning, and partly because of too many inadequate lessons. There are signs, however, particularly in the Reception Class and Year 1 that the legacy of underachievement is being tackled and pupils are making at least satisfactory progress.

Since the last visit, in all year groups, progress in English has accelerated, and this is reflected in lessons and in pupils' work. Progress is slower in mathematics and standards remain well below average, particularly in Key Stage 1. Teachers have a greater understanding of the standards that pupils should be attaining and the progress that individual pupils make. This is because effective use is made of regular and frequent discussions between senior leaders and teachers about pupils' progress.

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 – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning have been sustained. Pupils, in the meeting with inspectors, unanimously affirmed that behaviour had improved. This is reflected in the positive and polite way they conduct themselves around the school, and in their good relationships with each other, staff and visitors. The majority of pupils enjoy lessons but this is most marked in Years 4, 5 and 6. They talk enthusiastically and knowledgeably about what they have learned, for example, in the chocolate topic and in lessons about 'The Highwayman'. Pupils' increasing pride and enjoyment of school is reflected in the improving rate of attendance. In upper Key Stage 2, where teaching and the curriculum is exciting, attendance is high. The school has worked very well with targeted families to engage them and to build a stronger relationship with school. Initiatives such as involving parents in extra-curricular activities and courses have started to have an impact. Persistent absence has reduced by 5% in the targeted families and overall attendance is approximately 1% higher than last year. There is still much to do, particularly to involve pupils more to identify and tackle the reasons why they do not want to attend. The group of pupils interviewed by inspectors cited play and break times as an issue – the school is actively looking into how this important part of the day could be improved.

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

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

Quality of provision

Effective action has been taken to improve the pace of lessons. Teaching is now brisk and in many classes, pupils are fully involved in their learning and have opportunities to think, reason and to explain their ideas. Learning is active. Talking partners are used as a very effective tool to engage and involve learners. Although the number of good or better lessons is similar to the last visit, there have been improvements to the teaching of English. A greater proportion of English lessons are good and this is borne out in pupils' work and the progress they make. Teaching is significantly weaker in mathematics. All of the inadequate lessons observed on the visit were in this subject. Activities were often poorly matched to pupils' abilities. More able learners are not challenged sufficiently and pupils are engaged on low level dull activities that did not enable them to think, to reason or to extend their understanding. More work needs to be done to improve the activities that pupils complete, for example, to use resources effectively rather than asking pupils to work on undifferentiated worksheets that stifle thinking.

Summative assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress have improved. However, although teachers have access to better assessment data, in Key Stage 1 and in the Foundation Stage class, they are not all using it well enough to inform planned activities. This is particularly noted for pupils who are more able who are often given the same work as average ability pupils.

The curriculum, particularly in Years 4 to 6, is exciting and meets pupils' needs and interests. It is no coincidence that in these classes, pupils' attendance, progress and enthusiasm is higher than in other parts of the school. Year 6 pupils talked animatedly, for example, about what they had learnt in their topic about chocolate. The activities in this topic were well conceived to challenge pupils' thinking and to enable them to reach higher levels of 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

Much work has been carried out since the last monitoring visit to improve leadership and management and to increase the school's capacity to improve. Stability within the senior leadership has aided the school's progress. The headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to provide good leadership and to take difficult decisions in order to improve provision for pupils. The deputy headteacher, however, is leaving at the end of the summer term. The school has successfully recruited a teacher to take her place who already knows and works in the school, this should minimise disruption and aid continuity.

There is a clearer focus to school improvement since the last visit. Subject leaders have worked hard to devise comprehensive action plans which are synchronised precisely to the school improvement plan. This ensures that all staff have a clearer understanding of the priorities for improvement. The success criteria are sharper and easier for governors and subject leaders to evaluate. Leaders who have recently been appointed to take on new roles from September are enthusiastic about the challenges that lie ahead. They talk positively about the new expectations of them and are looking forward to the contribution that they will make to the school's improvement. Subject leaders have some collated data which they can now use as a basis to evaluate teaching and learning. They are now poised to play a more effective role in raising standards in their subject areas. They know that their next steps are to include greater evaluation of pupils' progress in their subjects at different levels, for example, at whole-year level and for groups of pupils.

Fundamental to the improvements since the last visit is the role and quality of governance. As a group, governors are developing rapidly and offer an effective balance of challenge and support to the school. Relationships with school are positive and communication is effective. Links to subject areas are beginning to provide governors with a greater understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses in provision. As this is a new initiative, governors and the school have yet to see the full impact of this work. Monthly governing body meetings are effective in ensuring governors are able to evaluate the school and hold the leadership to account. Central to the effective action and sometimes difficult decisions is governors' understanding that pupils' achievements are paramount.

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 the governing body holds the school's leadership rigorously to account - good

External support

The LA's good financial support has continued. This has allowed for an intervention teacher to work successfully in Key Stage 2 and to provide consistently good teaching and learning. From September, she will take up a permanent position at the school. The school has made good use of support from the human resources team to tackle the turbulence in staffing in order to minimise disruption to pupils' learning. Support from two advanced skills teachers has been extended since the last visit, with one teacher doubling her time at the school to two days per week. Due to LA reorganisation, support for the school to improve attendance through the education welfare service has been inadequate. Despite being a priority school, there has been very limited support and, consequently, the impact has been negligible.