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3 February 2008

Mrs Eileen McBirnie  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs McBirnie

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

Following my visit with Mr John Ashton and Mr Frank Carruthers, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 30 and 31 January 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 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

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 for Liverpool and the Liverpool Archdiocesan Director of Schools.

Yours sincerely

Frank Ravey  
Additional Inspector

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

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 30–31 January 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons throughout the school. Discussions were held with key staff and with pupils. Discussions also took place with the chair of the governors' monitoring committee, representatives from the local authority (LA) and the school improvement partner. A range of documents was examined and pupils' behaviour and attitudes were observed in lessons and around the school.

### Context

Since the previous inspection, two teachers have been absent through long-term illness. During this visit temporary teachers were teaching four out of the 12 classes in Key Stages 1 and 2. Two of these teachers began working in the school at the start of January 2008; the others started two days before the monitoring inspection began.

### Achievement and standards

Standards remain low throughout the school, especially in writing, and pupils continue to underachieve. Pupils' progress is improving although there are times when they do not achieve as well as they should, especially in their written work. This is because work is not planned sufficiently closely to match their learning needs and it means that, in particular, the more able pupils and those who find learning difficult still do not learn as well as they should. Although the rate of progress is improving, it is not yet fast enough for pupils to make up the significant amount of lost ground in their learning. In a few lessons the key factors that accelerate learning, such as good pace and the right level of challenge in the work, are present but these lessons remain a minority. Evaluating how well pupils are doing over longer periods of time is difficult because the school does not have a clear overview of the progress of different groups. This in turn makes it difficult to provide teachers with the accurate information they need to help raise achievement.

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

- Raise standards and increase pupils' rates of progress in English, mathematics and science at Key Stages 1 and 2 – inadequate

### Personal development and well-being

Pastoral care for pupils continues to be strong. As reported at the inspection in September, pupils are keen to work hard and do their best, even when teaching lacks pace. Relationships in lessons and throughout the school remain positive and behaviour has improved. The school is working effectively in partnership with the

lead local authority officer to improve attendance. A range of imaginative initiatives with external partners is beginning to raise attendance; the figures for the autumn term 2007 were the best the school has achieved in comparable periods for several years. Nonetheless, attendance remains lower than it should be.

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

- Raise the level of attendance to at least the national average – satisfactory

#### Quality of provision

Throughout the school, teachers make classes pleasant places in which to work. They lay some solid foundations for learning but they do not always build sufficiently well upon these in relation to raising standards and improving achievement. Much of the teaching enables pupils to make steady gains in their learning but they need to be making much bigger gains to overcome significant underachievement and reach the standards they should. Expectations of what pupils should achieve are not always pitched correctly. Work planned does not always stretch the more able nor does it allow the slower learners to take the smaller steps they need in order to be secure in their understanding. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should. There are instances of better teaching, when sharply focused learning objectives and challenging tasks result in pupils learning quickly and achieving well, but more commonly teaching promotes satisfactory rather than good progress.

The school is taking firm action to improve weaknesses in the way assessment information is gathered and used to help teachers plan work that matches pupils' learning needs. The assessment coordinator is now a member of the leadership team and is influencing practice more widely. While this work is still in its early stages, the coordinator is improving the procedures for checking pupils' progress so that teachers can have a steady stream of accurate information about pupils. This information should help teachers plan work that increases pupils' progress and eradicates their underachievement. The implementation of a new marking policy is beginning to improve the guidance that teachers give pupils about improving their work although the quality of marking is inconsistent.

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

- Make better use of assessment information to plan work which meets the needs of pupils of all abilities and provides pupils with guidance on how to improve their work – satisfactory

#### Leadership and management

School leaders show a strong commitment to improving the quality of education the school provides. This commitment, and the receptiveness to new ideas from other partners, is beginning to prove effective, for example in raising attendance and improving systems to check pupils' progress. The school's partnerships with other agencies have improved since the inspection in September. With the support of the

LA and the archdiocese, the governing body has been strengthened and is more closely involved in monitoring the school's implementation of its action plan. As a result, the governing body has a clearer picture of what needs to be done to secure improvements and has the specialist expertise to advise on this.

The leadership team has been enlarged to manage the school's action plan. However, the leadership team has yet to define areas of responsibility, distribute key tasks and hold school managers accountable for their actions. This limits its overall view of the impact of those actions. For example, the school is starting to address weaknesses in monitoring and evaluating its work. This involves senior and subject leaders in regularly checking teaching and learning, teachers' planning and pupils' written work. This work is providing valuable information for the school's leaders. However, the information is not being used effectively enough to identify exactly what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning and thereby raise standards. Some appropriate actions are being taken but the process is not managed tightly enough to have more than a limited impact. Individuals are striving hard to secure improvement, but the leadership team is not pulling together to become the driving force for this process. The governing body is making progress towards resolving the issues relating to meeting all its statutory requirements.

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and meeting statutory requirements – inadequate

#### External support

The LA's statement of action is satisfactory. The LA is providing good support to the school and access to a wide range of expertise. It has also provided a rigorous review of the work of the school that states unequivocally what needs to be done to secure improvements. The school welcomes the contribution of its new school improvement partner.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Clarify the roles, responsibilities and lines of communication in the school's leadership team so that it functions effectively as the driving force for school improvement.
- Ensure that teaching consistently enables pupils to learn well and make good progress.