

27 June 2008

Mrs L Speed
Headteacher
St James' Church of England Primary School
Lyme Street
Haydock
St Helens
Merseyside
WA11 0NL

Dear Mrs Speed

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES' CHURCH
OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit, to your school on 25 and 26 June 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 February 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 be appointed only with the agreement of the lead inspector.

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 and Young Peoples Services for St Helens.

Yours sincerely

Judith Clarke
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST JAMES' CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 25 and 26 June 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, pupils, key staff, and the chair of governors. Meetings also took place with a representative from the local authority (LA) and the school improvement partner. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school were also observed.

Context

Since the inspection in February 2008, one member of staff has been absent from school through long-term illness. The deputy headteacher very recently left the school and another teacher is due to retire at the end of the summer term. There are three temporary teachers in the school. One teacher has been in the school since February and two just started before this monitoring inspection began. Two members of staff have recently returned to school after taking maternity leave. The governing body has had its delegated powers removed by the LA. There are no plans to close the school.

Achievement and standards

Although weak teaching is being tackled, there is still more that needs to be done to overcome the underachievement that persists. Standards remain well below average throughout the school and pupils are not achieving as well as they should. Standards in writing remain particularly low and significant underachievement is evident throughout the school. Staff have recognised the need to look at the basic methods for the teaching of writing to get the whole process right. The school is determined that improvement must be clear and sustainable. Pupils' spelling, letter formation, handwriting, presentation of work and punctuation are all areas identified for improvement. Achievement in mathematics is improving. This is because the coordinator and the school have worked closely with the LA over an extended period of time and this is having a more noticeable impact on raising standards. Even so, work remains to be done in ensuring pupils approach their tasks logically and think carefully through their problems as they work to solve them.

A range of assessment procedures have been put in place and these are enabling teachers to identify pupils who are not making sufficient progress so that they can be targeted for extra help and support. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now more accurately identified and appropriate provision is being made for them.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

The wide range of strategies implemented by the school to improve pupils' behaviour is beginning to pay off. Pupils report that behaviour is better both in class and on the playground and as a result, they feel safer and more secure in school. A key factor in this improvement is the way staff now have a more consistent approach to encouraging and promoting good behaviour. For example, pupils now line up in a more orderly manner at the end of playtimes because of consistent implementation of established procedures. This consistent approach gives the pupils a clearer framework within which to work. They understand what is expected of them and respond appropriately. A consequence is that there is less disruption to learning in class and so pupils are able to concentrate better on their tasks. Lunchtimes are also calmer. Lunchtime supervisors have received additional training so they, too, manage pupils better. An improved range of equipment for the pupils to play with means that they enjoy lunchtimes more and their behaviour is improving.

The school works hard to promote attendance with those parents who do not regularly send their children to school. The pupils also report that the opportunities they have to discuss problems in class are helping them to think more positively about each other and they are becoming more in tune with and tolerant of differences. The school deals more effectively with incidents of bullying that are decreasing overall and pupils report that they know who to turn to if they have problems or concerns. Attractive, informative displays remind pupils that bullying is not to be tolerated and pupils must always seek help if they need it. Pupils' attitudes to their work are variable; on some occasions pupils are passive in class discussions or find it difficult to motivate themselves in their tasks, particularly when working independently. However, on the whole, pupils' attitudes to their work are improving and they are keener to take part in lessons. All staff promote group work and working with a partner to encourage pupils to take an active part in lessons and also to develop their speaking and listening skills.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Classroom and corridor walls are now more attractive and celebrate the pupils' work. Displays encourage and prompt pupils to do their best with targets, and reminders for good punctuation are clearly portrayed. Relationships in the classes are stronger. However, in too many lessons, pupils' learning has been significantly disrupted due to lack of stability within personnel. This has meant frequent changes in expectation and personnel for some pupils. Temporary staff have also needed time to become fully aware of the needs of all the pupils in their class. This lack of consistency continues to prevent pupils' learning and achievement from improving. Teaching is

not yet strong enough to eradicate the poor learning from the past. Lessons are planned appropriately but are not always matched to the pupils' exact needs so as to challenge their thinking and ensure their learning moves on at a fast enough pace. Consequently, tasks are sometimes too easy for the pupils. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution in class and help the pupils to sort out and articulate their ideas.

Assessments and tracking information are beginning to give the teachers clearer information on how well the pupils are doing. Staff are working hard to make sure that assessments of the pupils' work are accurate. They recognise that this is key to raising achievement as it enables them to know exactly where the pupils are with their learning so that lessons can be set at the right level of demand. Marking of pupils' work, whilst encouraging, does not always help them to see the next steps in their learning in order to improve their work.

Assessment procedures and the curriculum are improving. Throughout the school, the class timetables have been evaluated and the curriculum reviewed to ensure that there is appropriate coverage of all subjects and there is little time wasted. Teachers' planning indicates that they are becoming more aware of cross-curricular links when planning their lessons. They realise that this is important as it provides opportunities for the pupils to use and practise their skills across other subjects. There has been a thorough audit of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, resulting in improved planning of the provision for them. The quality of the overall provision of the Foundation Stage has improved since the inspection in February 2008. Better use is made of the improved outdoor environment to promote independence and learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, eradicating inadequate teaching – inadequate
- Improve the quality of the curriculum and the overall provision within the Foundation Stage – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher is determined to eliminate underachievement and has a clear vision for improvement in the school. The staff report that morale is much higher and they are all keen to move forward. The headteacher has put in place strategies designed to eliminate inadequate teaching and poor behaviour. She has a realistic grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and understands the need for new initiatives to be sustainable. She is the driving force for improvement within the school and has not shirked making difficult decisions. The action plan for raising achievement is thorough and is designed to get to the root cause of the pupils' underachievement. It sets in place strategies to improve provision and to monitor and evaluate performance across the work of the school. It is too early to see the full impact of these initiatives. At present, the teacher with responsibility for the coordination of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the numeracy

coordinator are the only members of staff who give additional leadership and management support to the headteacher. Other key post holders, for example, those responsible for assessment, literacy and science are currently absent from school. Consequently, there is no one currently leading improvement in these important areas.

Governors are determined to challenge as well as support the school. They have reviewed their committee structures and have attended additional training sessions so they are more aware of what needs to be done, but it is early days yet. Statutory requirements are now met with regard to safeguarding pupils and risk assessments are in place. All safeguarding policies have been reviewed and agreed.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Improve the leadership and management at all levels, including governance, in rigorously monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, meeting statutory requirements and ensuring pupils feel safe – inadequate

External support

The LA is providing good support to the school and its statement of action fulfils requirements. It has provided the school with a range of expertise, practical help and support to improve teaching and learning and to aid the headteacher in her work. There has been extra help provided in mathematics both for the coordinator and for the teachers. This is beginning to improve achievement in mathematics throughout the school. The LA has agreed to fund an extra teacher in Key Stage 1 for the next academic year. The school improvement partner is helping to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The school has also been linked with an outstanding school, which is a National Support School. This school provides teachers to work alongside staff to share ideas and promote excellence.