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14 November 2008

Mrs Eileen McBirnie
Headteacher
St John's Catholic Primary School
Sessions Road
Liverpool
L4 1SR

Dear Mrs McBirnie

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Mrs Sarah Drake and Mrs Judith Tolley, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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.

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 inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, key staff, groups of pupils, representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), the school improvement partner (SIP) and the headteacher consultant.

Context

The school continues to have four long-term temporary teachers. In addition, two teachers were absent during the monitoring inspection. The designation of the associate headteacher, appointed earlier in 2008, has changed to that of headteacher consultant. The school was due to move into new accommodation towards the end of this term but this has been postponed until January 2009.

Achievement and standards

Standards continue to rise overall, although in writing they have not improved. Provisional national assessments for Year 2 pupils in 2008 show significant improvements compared to 2007 in reading and mathematics for the proportions of pupils reaching the nationally expected levels. A similar picture of improvement is evident from provisional national test results in reading, mathematics and science at Year 6. Pupils' work seen during the monitoring inspection reflects these improvements. However, the more able pupils still do not do as well as they should in English, mathematics or science. In writing, too few pupils achieve the standards they should. The school recognises that while improvements have been made, there is still significant work to be done to raise standards in writing for all pupils and to raise the standards achieved in all subjects by the more able pupils. The school has recently implemented a strategy to raise standards in writing but while there are some early signs that this is having a positive impact, it is too early to judge whether writing standards are rising throughout the school.

Pupils' achievement continues to improve, particularly in reading and writing at Key Stage 1. This is due in part to the school's improved assessment procedures and the success of consequent intervention strategies for those pupils who are identified as falling behind in their learning. The match of work in lessons to pupils' learning needs is also improving but is not yet consistently sharp enough to enable the more able pupils to make as much progress as they should. Progress in developing writing skills remains slower than it should be, although there are signs, for example in Year 6, that it is starting to improve. The school is sustaining previous improvements in

the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to show positive attitudes to school. They are keen to learn and for the school to do well. They continue to behave well, especially when teaching is of a brisk pace and provides them with activities that really challenge them to find things out for themselves. Attendance has improved significantly, rising to a level very close to the LA average and being better than that achieved in other local primary schools. It is now much closer to the national average. This success is due to the school's continued effective use of a wide range of strategies for encouraging attendance, one of which resulted in an award from a local radio station.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Quality of provision

The school has maintained the level of good teaching observed during the previous visit, with the highest concentration of good teaching evident in Key Stage 2. Here, the brisk pace of most lessons and well devised strategies for getting pupils to think and learn for themselves result in eager learners and better progress. Learning becomes slower when pupils' skills of working independently are not so well developed. The extent to which the more able pupils are challenged to achieve as well as they should is still inconsistent. The school's monitoring of its work has also identified this issue and it is now developing strategies to rectify it, for example by grouping pupils by ability for mathematics in Years 5 and 6. Evidence from lessons suggests that this is achieving some early success although it is too soon for it to feed into longer-term assessments of pupils' performance.

The school's systems for tracking pupils' performance are now yielding a wealth of information about individuals, classes and groups of pupils. This information is being analysed and is leading to interventions to help pupils improve their progress. Early indications point to success in these measures. Teachers are now more actively involved in discussing with school leaders the progress of pupils in their classes. This is leading to pupils being set more challenging individual learning targets and, in lessons, to pupils being challenged appropriately and working more effectively. The quality of teachers' marking continues to vary although there is now a growing body of good practice in which teachers not only praise good performance but point out how pupils can improve their work. The recent introduction of procedures to help

pupils check the quality of their own work indicates the school's commitment to further improving pupils' learning.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), improvements to assessment procedures are starting to help staff check how well children are doing and what this means for the next steps in learning. However, staff continue to vary in their awareness of how best to intervene to help children get the most from their learning activities. Where such interactions are less effective, opportunities are missed for children to build upon and extend their learning. The school, in partnership with the LA, has responded quickly and positively to weaknesses in EYFS provision identified by the previous monitoring visit but it is too soon to gauge the success of its strategy for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

School leaders have a better view of what needs to be improved and are beginning to take the necessary steps to achieve this. The school is now starting to benefit from the big stride forward it took after its first monitoring visit to ensure that its senior leadership team became a driving force for improvement. The process of monitoring the work of the school is now being extended to subject leaders. These staff are increasingly clear about the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and about what needs to be done to improve it. This is underpinned by an improved system of communications between school staff, ensuring that key messages are heard. While initiatives for improving performance remain at a relatively early stage in their development, there are clear signs that they are taking root.

The school has implemented a monitoring plan and is undertaking a range of activities to support it. This is leading to a considerable volume of information being gathered about school performance. However, the school's leadership recognises that this broad-based approach to monitoring needs to develop into something that is more sharply focused on key areas of weakness in order to pinpoint not just *what* is weaker but also *why*. This will enable it to formulate the actions to remedy key weaknesses.

The governing body is developing a more robust approach to holding senior leaders to account for school performance. It is now questioning leaders closely on the effectiveness of monitoring strategies and in so doing is demonstrating a stronger commitment to school improvement. School leaders are working hard to improve the quality of teaching and have not been afraid to take some difficult decisions in order to do so. Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. The

sense of purpose and good team spirit noted at the last visit has continued to develop. Throughout the school, among staff, pupils and governors, there is a sense of optimism that the required improvements can be made.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The LA and school improvement partner continue to provide the school with a very good balance of support and challenge. The LA's thorough reviews of the school's progress are evidence of this as is the expertise provided by its individual consultants. The headteacher consultant continues to provide much-valued advice and guidance.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in September 2007.