

21 October 2008

Mr S. Hayes  
Executive Headteacher  
St John Fisher RC School  
Reeves Way  
Peterborough  
PE1 5JN

Dear Mr Hayes

### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JOHN FISHER RC SCHOOL

Following my visit with Alan Brewerton, Roderick Passant, and Catherine Stormonth, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7-8 October 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 April 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough, and the Diocesan Director of Schools' Service for the Diocese of East Anglia.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST JOHN FISHER RC SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 7-8 October 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team including those seconded from the local authority (LA), subject leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a representative from the LA.

### Context

In July 2008 the DCSF granted the LA permission to appoint an Interim Executive Board (IEB). This body has replaced the previous governing body. It is made up from appointed members, most of whom hold senior positions in local organisations, for example, the Diocese, the local council, the LA, and the police force. The chair of the IEB was a foundation governor of the former governing body; all other members are new. The headteacher left at the end of the summer term. She has been replaced on a temporary basis by an executive headteacher, who is the deputy headteacher of another secondary school in the Diocese. He took up post on the last day of the summer term 2008. Two new members of the leadership team have been temporarily seconded into the school by the LA, one on a part-time and one on a full-time basis. One new substantive assistant headteacher joined the school in September and a second was appointed internally during the summer term. Several new teachers joined the school at the start of the term, including three newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The school is part of the government's National Challenge programme. The school is due to move into new buildings in the spring term 2009.

### Achievement and standards

The school's initial analysis of its 2008 results indicate that the percentage of Key Stage 3 pupils who gained the nationally expected Level 5 in English and mathematics was similar to 2007, remaining slightly below the 2007 national figure in English and well below the national figure in mathematics. Provisional science results are lower than in 2007 and very low in comparison with the 2007 national figure. Too many pupils, including those underachieving groups identified at the last inspection, did not make enough progress in at least one of these core subjects.

At Key Stage 4 the provisional percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*-C grades at GCSE was around 10 percentage points lower than in 2007, and well below last year's national average. The percentage of pupils attaining 5A\*-C including English and mathematics also dropped. Pupils' attainment in different GCSE subjects is very variable.

Progress observed in lessons was inadequate overall. A key factor is that too often, teachers do not have the information they need to plan effective lessons for the range of learners.

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

- Raise students' achievement especially in mathematics and for underachieving groups, including boys, students with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language - *inadequate*

## Personal development and well-being

Behaviour during the monitoring inspection was satisfactory. Most pupils behaved well around the school. There was no evidence of dominating groups or intimidation although pupils said there were occasional fights. Pupils were polite, cheerful and welcoming to visitors. Behaviour in classrooms was more variable. Where teachers effectively motivated pupils and work was interesting and structured carefully so that they could succeed, pupils behaved well. The vast majority of pupils are not hard to motivate and they respond very positively to apt praise. Where teachers failed to engage pupils, or lacked behaviour management skills then lessons had a strong undercurrent of noisy chat which slowed learning. The school is aware of issues relating to the behaviour of Year 8 pupils in some lessons and plans to resolve this are being formed.

The school is producing a new behaviour management policy arising from discussions with staff and the school council. Whilst it details a tiered, graduated response to sanctions, crucially, it also stresses the positive approaches to managing and reinforcing good behaviour and the importance of praise. During the inspection, the policy was effectively introduced to Year 8 in an assembly.

Since June, the school has become part of the Safer Schools Partnership, an initiative involving the Community Police Support Officer for two days a week. The officer's visibility around the school and work with individuals has contributed to an increased confidence and sense of security amongst pupils, and the school has begun to involve her in any individual incidents or concerns deemed to be serious.

The number of exclusions has dropped this term because the school has introduced a 'seclusion unit' where pupils carry out school work in isolation. Importantly, pupils are formally admitted and parents contacted. The creation of the unit aims to ensure that pupils' whereabouts are known and has started to give the school the opportunity to resolve the issues which caused the initial problem. The school is aware that an overly high proportion of pupils excluded on a fixed term basis during the summer term were pupils with learning difficulties. The school appropriately records and reports racist incidents and the way in which they were dealt with.

## Quality of provision

Teaching observed during the visit was inadequate overall. Around one third of lessons observed were good, one third was satisfactory, and as at the time of the section 5 inspection, one third was inadequate. Initial steps have been taken to plan for the improvement of teaching and learning but these have yet to have any impact.

A common feature of inadequate teaching was that lessons did not cater for the needs of the individual learners. For example, neither planning nor teaching was suitable for pupils learning English as an additional language (EAL), or those with learning difficulties, or the most able pupils. As a result, few pupils made enough progress. The pace was either too slow, or was too fast and superficial so that pupils did not have time to grasp the concepts. Questions were seldom used to probe pupils' understanding or to extend their thinking. Sometimes, pupils grew bored and restless. Mostly, however, pupils in inadequate lessons were passive and quiet. In a very few lessons, inadequate or inexperienced management of pupils' low level disruption led to this escalating so that behaviour interfered with the pace of learning. In both the inadequate lessons and those which were satisfactory, there was an insufficient focus on key subject vocabulary. Support staff in these lessons were not effectively directed by the teacher.

Good lessons were seen in a range of subjects, and several good lessons were seen in English. In good lessons, teachers enthused pupils from the start. Teachers clearly communicated their high expectations of what pupils would achieve, and pupils strove to meet them. Management of behaviour was calm and positive, with a constant emphasis on returning pupils' focus to their learning where it wavered, and on praise and encouragement. Key vocabulary was used and was clearly displayed which helped all pupils' progress and particularly that of EAL learners. Questioning was skilfully used both to check pupils' understanding and to extend their thinking. Lessons were carefully structured, based on teachers' good knowledge of the pupils' current understanding, to allow pupils to build on each step in their learning. In all good lessons there was a positive learning atmosphere, with good working relationships between staff and pupils.

The quality of marking is unsatisfactory. While most teachers mark pupils' work regularly, books in some classes have yet to be marked this term. When marking is good, for example in art, teachers provide high quality feedback to students which, not only corrects inaccurate work but provides helpful advice about how students can improve. However, the majority of marking seen was cursory. Although many teachers follow the guidelines in the marking policy, the information provided does not help students understand the level or grade at which they are currently working nor does it provide good quality advice on how to improve. There is very little evidence of peer or self-assessment.

Lesson planning is too variable. In the best planning, such as for a PE lesson, objectives are clear, planning matches work to the individual needs of students and students are encouraged to assess their own and their peers' performance. Most plans, however, fail to indicate how work will suit the needs of different students including those for whom English is not their first language or for those who have learning difficulties. As a result there is insufficient differentiation in too many lessons. Similarly most lesson plans do not provide sufficient information about how progress will be assessed, nor provide opportunities for peer or self-assessment.

The provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and EAL learners remains inadequate. However, since September, senior leaders have reviewed the provision for these essential elements of the school's work, and have identified the most

important priorities for improvement in new action plans. The school has made an appropriate start in developing links with external agencies to provide specialist advice and support.

For students with learning difficulties some useful new practices are being introduced, such as teaching assistants attending subject meetings to help share ideas and address issues. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on some pupils' learning. Teaching staff have been provided with improved and more regular communications about individuals. They have also been provided with information about students' levels of literacy and the nature of any learning difficulties to enable them to begin to meet students' needs with greater precision.

The attainment and progress of EAL pupils is yet to be analysed. The school is aware, however, that these pupils are underachieving in some subjects, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils come from diverse linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds and there is insufficient recording of their starting points and a lack of assessment and tracking to enable effective measurement of their progress. EAL learners to whom inspectors spoke think that they are making good progress in English but feel that other subjects are not adequately extending their skills of written and spoken English. Teaching resources to support EAL learners are poor and restrict learning opportunities.

The curriculum remains inadequate since it does not meet the needs of students in either Key Stage 3 or 4. The allocation of time to core subjects and physical education is below that recommended in both key stages. Statutory requirements for the provision of design technology (DT) in Years 7 to 9, for information communication technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11, and for citizenship throughout the school are not met. Key Stage 3 pupils are mainly taught in their tutor groups, which is not always suitable. No time is provided for personal, social, health and economics (PSHEE) education except as part of religious education. Whilst there is a reasonable range of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11, pupils have not been given the advice they have needed to enable them to choose options suited to their needs.

The executive headteacher has rightly recognised the shortcomings in provision and the urgency for changes in the organisation and delivery of subjects. As a result, planning has been swiftly put in place to introduce significant changes from January 2009, including improvements in the allocation of time to core subjects and improved provision for PSHEE. This includes the appointment of new staff to cover inadequacies in the provision for DT, although the provision for resistant materials will still be limited. Plans are also underway to improve the options system in Key Stage 4 from September 2009, to include a pathways approach so that work more closely meets the needs of students. The provision for ICT and citizenship, however, is likely to remain inadequate until September 2009.

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

- Co-ordinate more effectively any additional support for students, especially those with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language so that the curriculum meets their needs *inadequate*

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least satisfactory or better *inadequate*

## Leadership and management

Staff did not become fully aware that the school had been judged to require special measures until near the end of the summer term. A brief improvement plan was produced in the summer term by the deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers, based on the identified areas in the section 5 report, but little of this was put in place. Consequently, few actions took place during the summer term to secure any improvement in the school.

Since his appointment, the executive headteacher has been highly analytical and has swiftly and accurately assessed the extent of the school's weaknesses. These include issues with timetabling, the organisation of teaching groups, the allocation of staff to subject areas, the ICT infrastructure, and assessment and tracking. Members of the senior leadership team have had little responsibility for leading areas of whole school development. Senior leaders are also year co-ordinators and have a heavy teaching load. The executive headteacher has rightly identified that this is unsustainable and has been a factor in the school's difficulties. He has immediately allocated new responsibilities to senior leaders, which he sensibly intends to refine in the near future. Several leaders have made a sound start to planning for improvement in their areas of responsibility. Staff do not fully understand the extent of the weaknesses within the school or their roles in contributing to improvement, though positively, during the inspection many staff showed a keenness to discuss their lessons and how they could improve, even when the lesson had been judged to be good.

Subject leaders have had little autonomy to lead and manage their subject areas. They have not been held accountable for assessing and tracking the progress of pupils in their subject or for planning suitable improvements. Appropriately, the executive headteacher has held a series of meetings with these staff to seek their views, to begin to communicate the new expectations to them, and to assess the support they need.

Minutes of the former governing body's meetings from the summer term show little focus on the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, or on the judgement that the school requires special measures. The IEB is taking its role very seriously. Meetings to date have been appropriately focused on improvement. The chair of the IEB has a good grasp of the need for urgent improvement as well as the need to build a sustainable effective school and to ensure that aspirations are high for all pupils.

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

- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously analyse the effectiveness of actions taken to improve students' learning and progress *inadequate*



## External support

Difficulties in the relationship between the school and governors, and the LA and the Diocese remained unresolved throughout the summer term. Very few LA staff visited the school until September. Since this time, LA support has been satisfactory, though it is too early to judge its overall impact on improvement. Securing the services of the executive headteacher, with the full support of the Diocese, has been the most significant action taken. Importantly, the LA's senior school improvement adviser has a sound understanding of the need to work closely with the executive headteacher to ensure that all other LA support is suitable and is introduced at an appropriate rate. Since September this has been achieved. The LA has seconded one of its advisers to work as an executive assistant headteacher with a particular focus on teaching and learning and assessment and tracking. Another experienced senior leader has been secured by the LA to work with the school to improve provision for EAL pupils and those with learning difficulties. Support for these aspects is much needed and seconded leaders have worked well with the leadership team to accurately assess the next steps. The LA has arranged additional support for NQTs.

The LA acknowledges the issues with relationships with the school led to its action plan being based on an incomplete knowledge of the extent of the issues. The LA has therefore taken the appropriate decision to redraft the action plan, taking into account the findings of its own recent review and the findings of the executive headteacher. Ofsted's comments on the action plan are to be incorporated.

The LA's target date of the spring term 2010 for the removal of special measures is reasonable, though given the slow start to the improvement process, the school's progress will need to accelerate considerably if this target is to be met.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all staff understand the judgement of 'special measures' and the implications of this for the school's work.
- Identify, share and build upon good individual and departmental practice.
- Involve subject leaders in a rigorous analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of all subject areas and in planning and acting to improve them.