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03 April 2009

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 Anna Dawson and Mr Peter Jones, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 01 and 02 April 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 01 and 02 April 2009

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; and the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has made five appointments to its permanent teaching staff. It has also moved to a new building, very close to the previous building. Access to some outdoor space will remain restricted until the demolition of the previous building and the completion of further landscaping work.

Achievement and standards

The significant improvement in both the quality and quantity of work in the books of the more able pupils is an indication of the big step forward taken by the school since the previous monitoring inspection. This is due to the more effective approach being taken by teachers to provide for the learning needs of these and other groups of pupils and to the continued and accelerating success of the school's improvement strategy. This improvement is also reflected in the increased proportion of lessons in which good progress was observed during the inspection.

School assessment information shows that the significant improvement in standards and progress achieved in the 2008 Year 2 and Year 6 national test and assessment scores is now being sustained by pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are on course to meet challenging targets in English and mathematics. The school is maintaining the significant overall improvement in standards shown in the 2008 national test and assessment results. In particular, the progress in writing of pupils currently at the school is improving considerably and standards in this subject are rising. At the same time, the school recognises that the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in their tests, while improving, is still lower than it should be. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to make satisfactory progress overall and in some lessons their progress is quicker. The school's much improved analysis of performance data for groups of pupils enables it to demonstrate that pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language are at least maintaining a satisfactory rate of progress and sometimes accelerating this further.

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 – good

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to behave well both in lessons and around the school. They continue to enjoy their learning and to show good attitudes to work. The school has maintained the improvement in attendance noted in the previous monitoring report even though current figures include a period before Christmas when attendance dipped due to extensive illness among pupils. The school's strategies for encouraging attendance continue to have a positive impact.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Quality of provision

The proportion of good teaching has improved significantly since the previous monitoring inspection. Even where teaching is satisfactory, elements of good practice are evident. The increasingly effective teaching is impacting strongly on the quality of pupils' learning. This is now more consistently spread across both key stages, enabling all year groups to benefit. There is evidence of more effective lesson planning, including some which is now outstanding, in which teachers plan to challenge the more able both through questioning and independent activity. However, in a small number of cases the identification of such activities in lesson plans is still not as sharp as it should be. This was particularly noticeable in some science lessons. Teachers are making the most of the state-of-the-art technology available in every classroom in the new building to motivate pupils and to increase further their appetite for learning.

The quality of teachers' marking has improved considerably. In the best examples, teachers go to great length to point out exactly to pupils where improvements are needed and how they can be made. There has been a big step forward by all teachers, across Key Stages 1 and 2, in improving the use of assessment information, for example through the successful and regular progress meetings. These enable the school quickly to identify and address the underachievement, or other learning difficulties, of individual pupils. The key to this improvement is the involvement of each class teacher in meeting with senior managers each half term. This is enabling teachers to gain a much more informed and accurate view of pupils' progress and is improving learning and achievement, including of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Intervention strategies are increasingly effective in supporting this process. The school is building well upon an earlier

initiative to encourage pupils to evaluate the quality of their own work. The success of this in improving learning is now evident both among older and younger pupils.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, better procedures are being developed for assessing and recording children's skills in communication, language and literacy. Monitoring of progress has begun in relation to this and to children's personal, social and emotional development. However, while staff have received training in developing the skills of knowing when and how to intervene to extend children's learning and thinking, practice in this important aspect remains inconsistent. As a result, while children benefit from the direct teaching they receive, they still do not benefit as much as they should from the learning opportunities provided by independent activities.

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 pupils with guidance on how to improve their work – good

Leadership and management

School leaders speak of a 'sea change' in the climate for improvement in the school. This phrase aptly sums up the extent and depth of the progress being made. While the two previous visits saw the steady laying down of foundations for improvement, now the building is going up rapidly! Leaders and governors have developed a very clear view of the school they want St John's to be and are taking confident and increasingly successful steps towards achieving their aim. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school have become embedded in school practice. They have extended to involve subject coordinators and, through progress meetings, class teachers. Senior leaders have developed an accurate view of the school's performance and talk knowledgeably of how it can be improved. More significantly, they are increasingly effective in guiding staff to achieve these improvements through a more sharply focused approach to addressing key areas of weakness. A sense of organisation and purpose now pervades the school. The governing body continues to develop its role effectively, with key members providing robust and consistent challenge as well as support to senior leaders. Omissions to statutory requirements identified by the previous section 5 inspection have been rectified. School leaders and governors are well aware of the need to sustain recent good progress. Aided by the uplift of wonderful new accommodation, there is a growing confidence throughout the school that they will.

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 – good

External support

The local authority and school improvement partner continue to provide the school with a very good balance of support and challenge.

Priorities for further improvement

These remain the issues identified by the previous section 5 inspection.