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Mrs J Jones
The Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Church Road
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Brighton
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Dear Mrs Jones

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 September 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the staff and the groups of pupils with whom I had meetings during my visit.

Since the previous inspection in April 2010, the school has been affected by significant turbulence in staffing. This includes long term absence and maternity leave as well as some predicted staff turnover. Two newly qualified teachers have been appointed to permanent positions as well as a temporary teacher to cover maternity leave. The current Chair of the Governing Body very recently took on this role, and there have been significant changes to membership of the governing body since the previous inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 27 and 28 April 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Most children start school with skills below those typical for their age group and a significant number of them are at the early stages of learning to speak English. As a result of careful transition, skilled assessment and planning, children settle into



school well and make good progress in all areas of learning. Pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1. The detailed planning and assessments, as well as an exciting and engaging curriculum throughout Key Stage 1, give rise to good progress, and at the end of Key Stage 1 attainment is broadly average. Pupil progress in Key Stage 2 has been less consistent, with some groups of pupils making better progress than their peers, and progress in some classes being better than in others. Despite this, attainment levels are rising overall, and most pupils made two levels of progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in 2011. Some discrepancy in attainment between subjects remains and the legacy of underachievement in Key Stage 2 continues to be evident in pupils' work in Year 6.

Monitoring and assessment have recently been strengthened. Regular teachers' assessments feed into the school's pupil progress tracking system. Procedures that exist for reviewing and responding to information arising from data analysis now ensure that pupils making less than expected progress are identified and support and intervention provided. Teachers moderate pupils' work and assessment of mathematics is secure. Training has taken place in the assessment of reading and teachers are increasingly confident in this area. The need for further training in the accurate levelling of writing has rightly been identified.

Lesson observations confirm that teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Lesson planning throughout the school is of a consistently good standard, ensuring that planned activities are well suited to pupils' abilities, including challenge for the most able. Pupils are well motivated and have a positive rapport with their teachers and other adults which fosters their good attitudes towards learning. The school environment is effectively used to stimulate interest in the 'deep learning' topics and pupils' very good behaviour supports learning well. However, high expectations are not consistently applied and, in a minority of classes, the standard of presentation and handwriting in workbooks is less good than it should be. Throughout the school pupils are given plentiful opportunities to collaborate and to use their knowledge to solve problems. Pupils regularly discuss their work and peer- and self-assessment are good features of many lessons. Time boundaries are frequently used effectively so that the pace of learning is rapid and all pupils remain engaged. Other aspects of assessment to support learning are less well established. Some pupils are aware of their targets, but many are not. Whilst pupil workbooks are marked up to date, marking does not provide sufficient guidance on next steps to improve. As a result, some opportunities to maximise pupil progress are not realised.

The headteacher is fully aware of the current standards of attainment and progress through the school, including the few remaining inconsistencies in quality of provision and rates of progress. Her judgement regarding the quality of teaching and learning is entirely accurate. School improvement plans are regularly updated and precisely reflect current priorities and planned actions. Whilst plans are evaluated, these should focus more sharply on the impact of actions and changes to pupil outcomes.



Improvements to governance have been established, including the introduction of a more effective committee and reporting structure. The governing body possesses relevant experience and skills and is well equipped to carry out this role effectively. The school's improvement partner and other local authority consultants give high-quality and well-received support to the school, in particular with training to raise the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good, which is being conspicuously successful.

The school's capacity to move forward is evident. Despite significant and regular changes to staffing over a protracted period of time, hindering the pace of progress overall and particularly in Key Stage 2, vital improvements have been secured. Significantly, the quality of teaching is now good overall and the focus on most able pupils brought about a significant increase in Level 5 attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2011. Planning is detailed throughout the school, including differentiation and identification of the role of adults. As a result, learning tasks are well matched to pupils' needs. School leadership and capacity for sustained improvement have been further enhanced by the strengthening of the governing body.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2010

- Improve the quality of teaching by securing greater consistency in the delivery of:
 - well paced lessons
 - high expectations of what pupils can do
 - greater challenge for more able pupils.
- Eradicate pockets of underachievement in two Key Stage 2 classes by ensuring work is better matched to pupils' needs so that pupils all progress as well as they can.

