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Mrs A Heald
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Fitzwilliam Street
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Heald

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Our Lady and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 December 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

At the time of the previous inspection, the recently appointed headteacher was bringing the school towards the end of a long period of turbulence in leadership and staffing. This has now largely been resolved and there is much greater stability within the school.

As a result of the inspection in July 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.

The trend of improvement noted in the previous inspection has been maintained and an increased proportion of pupils are making satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. The unvalidated published data for pupils' performance in 2011 shows that this improving progress is raising standards of attainment, although they are still broadly average. With the increased stability in staffing, the new methods being introduced by school leaders are having a greater positive influence on teaching and the use of assessment, and this is beginning to improve pupils' progress at a much quicker pace. The impact of this is seen in school records, pupils' work and lesson observations, which show a rising number of pupils making good progress. This is especially the case in writing which is the current priority for school improvement. The progress made by different groups of pupils varies from class to class, depending on how well work has been adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. In some classes, more-able pupils accelerate their progress because they are working on very challenging and absorbing tasks which require them to make choices in the methods they use. In other classes, there is very effective support for less-able pupils, but the more able have less opportunity to extend their thinking skills. School leaders have started to analyse

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their assessment data to identify precisely which groups in each class need more support or challenge to accelerate their progress, however, this work is at an early stage.

Pupils' progress is improving because there is much greater consistency in effective teaching across the school, especially in planning lessons. Plans now ensure a strongly focused objective for learning new skills in each lesson that builds on what pupils have learned previously. Pupils learn at a faster pace because their teachers' explanations stick closely to the objective, leaving plenty of time for them to engage in interesting group activities. More able pupils are frequently challenged to identify for themselves the best methods to use. Where there is some variation in adapting work to meet the needs of each group, it is linked more to teachers' experience than to their capabilities or commitment. School leaders are aware of this issue and are effectively tackling it by providing appropriate training for newer teachers. The majority of teachers have become more consistently effective in using questions to check pupils' progress during lessons and to alter their lesson plan where necessary. They provide a constructive climate for learning in which pupils learn independently through discussion and by referring to useful guidance on wall displays.

The main driver for better teaching and pupils' outcomes is the leaders' rapidly improving approach to evaluating the school's work and identifying clearly where weaknesses need to be eradicated. Evidence is drawn from a wide range of sources, including information about pupils' achievement, and this forms a rounded and detailed picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Based on this, leaders have a much more sharply focused improvement plan, pinpointing accurately where staff need to concentrate their efforts to raise standards of attainment. Subject leaders for English and mathematics have significantly improved their contribution to school evaluation and improvement planning. They have also increased their role in working with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to ensure that improvements become embedded in every class. Because of the way in which the four leaders are working together, the pace of school improvement has increased notably. This has most recently been seen in the teaching of writing and mathematical calculation, with the result that a rising number of pupils are rapidly improving their achievement. School leaders are, therefore, making good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. They have made effective use of the constructive support and challenge offered by the local authority and School Improvement Partner. The school meets requirements for keeping pupils safe.

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

Yours sincerely

John Rutherford
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate the progress of all pupils by:
 - making better use of assessment to provide precise and challenging learning objectives for pupils of all abilities to achieve
 - ensure there are opportunities for more-able pupils to develop and practise their independent learning skills.

- Improve the effectiveness of the senior staff team by:
 - monitoring more rigorously the quality of pupils' learning in lessons
 - simplifying the 'developing excellence plan' by providing fewer and sharper priorities, so that it is clearer upon what areas all staff should focus their actions.