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20 January 2012

Mrs Wilson
Headteacher
St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School
South Road
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 2NU

Dear Mrs Wilson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 January 2012, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the school has formed a hard federation with St Paul's RCVA middle school and both schools share a recently refurbished building on the same site. The headteacher of the first school is now executive headteacher of both schools. A new governing body was formed in October 2011. The deputy headteacher has left and a new deputy will start at the beginning of the summer term. Two new teachers have been appointed in Year 1 and Year 2.

As a result of the inspection on 19 and 20 October 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 good progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards of attainment have risen since the previous inspection. Results in national tests show a trend of improvement and were above average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2011. Pupils' achievements are higher, including those of the most-able. This is because assessment information is used more consistently and effectively to ensure work is well matched to the needs of individual pupils. Pupils are making better progress as a result of work which is more challenging and that sufficient time is provided in lessons to help them engage fully with tasks. The curriculum has improved and pupils have time to write at length and think critically across a wider range of subjects. The most recent school data show the trend of improvement is continuing. The pattern of attendance, which is broadly average, and good behaviour continue to be the same as they were at the time of the last

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report. The school has introduced new initiatives and is working closely with partners to reduce the persistent absence of a small group of pupils.

The quality of teaching

Inspection evidence and information from the school's own evaluation confirm the school is taking effective action to increase the amount of good teaching. The quality of teaching is improving because there is a better focus on providing more exciting opportunities for pupils to think critically, solve problems and apply their skills. The match between their work, capabilities and starting points has improved and work is planned effectively to cater for the wide range of ability and needs. Teachers' questioning is skilful and encourages pupils to think about new ideas. Checks on progress are more frequent and pupils are able to learn through a wider range of interesting activities. Marking which helps pupils to improve is consistent across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Work to maintain and improve behaviour continues and there is a sharp focus on the conduct and behaviour of pupils towards other members of the school community. Attitudes to learning are positive and the drive to continue improving pupils' social and moral development is at the heart of the school ethos. The safety of pupils continues to be high priority.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The quality of leadership and management has been strengthened and the school is demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The federation with the middle school has provided more time for the headteacher to reflect, innovate and take action to improve the school. This was an area identified in the previous report because the headteacher had a large teaching commitment and carried out tasks which would have been better if they had been delegated. The analysis of the school's development and performance has improved and the purpose of monitoring is clearly understood by all managers. The local authority is providing effective support for school improvement which is tailored to the school's needs. The School Improvement Partner and the governors are rigorously challenging the school to move forward.

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,

Paul Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2011

- By the end of the current school year, raise pupils' attainment, especially for the more-able pupils by:
 - providing more exciting opportunities for pupils to think critically, solve problems and apply their skills, especially in writing, across a wider range of subjects
 - ensuring that data are consistently well used so that work is well matched to the needs of individual pupils.

- Provide more opportunities for the headteacher to reflect and to innovate for improvement.