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Mr Peter Hennessey  
Headteacher  
St Catherine's RC Primary School  
School Lane  
Didsbury  
Manchester  
M20 6HS

Dear Mr Hennessey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 September to look at your school's curriculum and how you have promoted innovation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and visits to some lessons and the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

- The progress and attainment of pupils is exceptionally high in the core subjects. Most pupils attain above average levels.
- The pupils' personal development is outstanding also. The many exciting curriculum activities motivate them and enable them to relate to each other, care for each other, and support each other's learning very effectively.
- In many lessons, pupil talk is excellent: children help each other to learn and refine their ideas in sophisticated and effective ways. This starts in the nursery and continues to develop right to the top of the school. However, in some lessons, opportunities for pupils to contribute in this way are missed.

## Quality of curriculum

- On the face of it, the school provides a traditional curriculum, based on national guidance. This is true but it only tells half of the story. In fact, the curriculum is also highly innovative. Each day, pupils experience exciting and inventive lessons and events including visits out, visitors and creative opportunities. They have access to wonderful resources which members of staff gather and which bring learning to life. Pupils also learn, in a systematic way, strategies for solving problems, checking their work or writing in particular styles, for example.
- Because so many lessons and activities are highly memorable, pupils also remember very well the learning that went with them. This contributes to the high standards. Behaviour and attitudes are excellent.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent with a very wide variety of activities available. The school plans to develop further its attached after-school club.
- Pupils can have their say, through the school council, for example. However, this is mainly confined to issues about the buildings or matters of organisation and routine. Opportunities for pupils to talk about how they learn best, or what sort of curriculum they would find most useful and enjoyable, are limited.
- The school's strong Christian ethos, and moral framework, underpins the curriculum. This does not, however, preclude interesting opportunities for learning about other cultures and traditions. For example, Year 3 pupils have the opportunity to take part in a Hindu parade in the Manchester Indian Festival, supported by a visit to school from a member of that community.
- The buildings and facilities are barely adequate overall and are unsatisfactory in Year 3 and the Foundation Stage. To their credit, staff make the very most of this environment. The many displays around the school are vibrant and stimulating, supporting learning very well indeed. The outdoor area for the Foundation Stage is well-designed and attractive, and used productively, despite being cramped.

## Leadership and management of the curriculum

- The curriculum is successful because the approach taken to it has developed over time and staff have the confidence and the vision to pursue it consistently. Just as importantly, effort is not wasted in fussy or time-consuming planning and assessment systems. National materials have been shrewdly used and adapted over time to provide an appropriate basis, or minimum standard, from which staff can develop exciting lessons.
- The head teacher was not the driving force for this approach, as it predates him. However, he understands and develops it very well. He has high expectations and ensures the work of the school is monitored carefully. He knows where further development of teaching is needed.

Nevertheless, his main approach is to motivate and support the staff, allowing them significant freedom to try new ideas.

- The school's assessment tracking system is exceptionally good in the core subjects and religious education (RE). It is very well overseen by the deputy headteacher, who provides a high level of support to staff, enabling them to focus on planning exciting activities for their classes. Pupils are quickly identified for effective extra support. Curriculum leaders in these subjects take strong responsibility and accountability.
- The school's assessment processes in other subjects, and personal development, are not as strong. Despite its excellent provision across the curriculum, the school is not able to say unequivocally how high standards are in these areas.

### Inclusion

- This is an inclusive school. Recently, a number of pupils from Eastern Europe and elsewhere have arrived. The other pupils are genuinely fascinated by their backgrounds and make them very welcome, helping them to feel part of the school very quickly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- give the pupils better opportunities to discuss their learning and have more say in future curriculum development
- ensure that standards in foundation subjects and personal development are more clearly measured, tracked and aggregated
- consider carefully the educational purposes of any further building or grounds development, so that any such improvements are not only justified by having a more pleasant environment, but are designed explicitly to support the school's curriculum philosophy and development.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
Her Majesty's Inspector