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Mrs Roberta Blakemore
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC Primary School, Wallasey
Wheatland Lane
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Dear Mrs Blakemore

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 October 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to me about the school and to the chair of governors for attending the feedback at short notice.

As a result of the inspection in June 2008 the school was asked to:

- raise standards, particularly in reading and writing in Key Stage 1
- improve measures for dealing with short-term staff absence so that the progress pupils make is consistent
- improve the management of staff and volunteers in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Results of the 2009 Key Stage 1 national assessments show a marked rise across the board compared with outcomes in 2008. Standards rose from well below average in 2008 to below average in 2009, representing good progress for these pupils given their starting points. By contrast, outcomes of the Key Stage 2 national tests were disappointing with sharp falls in results in the core subjects. The high levels of mobility in this cohort, with only a third of pupils spending all of Key Stage 2 at St Joseph's, combined adversely with an entrenched legacy of underachievement, some



behavioural issues and weaknesses in provision, limit the standards reached by these pupils. However, the school's robust tracking system indicates that a much larger proportion of current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach the levels expected for their age. Pupils are in line to meet their challenging targets in English, although their progress in mathematics is slower. The school's data show that an increasing proportion of pupils in Years 3 to 5 are making at least satisfactory progress and reaching the levels expected for their age. This is a consequence of improvements the school has made over time to the quality of its provision.

The school's leaders judge that the quality of teaching and learning has improved and observations conducted during this monitoring inspection bear out this view. Good features of the lessons visited include effective use of assessment to inform lesson planning; well-staged small steps in learning that develop skills and understanding incrementally; resources closely matched to the learning objectives; good use of self- and peer-assessment; and firm management of challenging behaviour. Where progress in lessons was a little less secure, pupils needed more concrete, practical props to help them grasp ideas.

The headteacher has implemented appropriate measures to ensure that the impact of short-term staff absences on pupils' progress is minimised. In the first instance, lessons are covered by a suitably qualified permanent member of staff. In addition, the school is able to call upon its permanent teachers who have job-shares. When necessary, the use of supply teachers is confined to a small number known to the school and pupils.

A continuing hindrance to pupils' achievement is the stubbornly low rate of attendance. Following an improved picture in 2007/08, the overall rate of attendance decreased in 2008/09 and is well below average. In addition, the rate of persistent absence increased. The school is working doggedly to address this resistant issue, employing a broad range of suitable strategies. Pupils say that attendance has a high profile in assemblies and that they feel motivated by rewards such as store vouchers. An additional support worker has been appointed this year to focus on reducing rates of persistent absence and reinforce the efforts of the home-school development worker.

A number of factors have contributed to improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage provision. A clear management structure has been established with the leader now forming part of the senior leadership team. The number of student and volunteer helpers has been reduced and, along with the establishment of a key worker system, this has clarified responsibilities for children's learning. The children who completed the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2009 made good progress from their starting points, an improvement on previous years. The school is working hard to develop an additional indoor space and an outdoor classroom to extend the attractive, well organised learning environment presently in use.



Since the school's removal from special measures, the local authority has continued to provide well-targeted support, for instance, in developing assessment for learning. The educational welfare service works closely with the school in the drive to raise attendance and is very responsive to the school's needs.

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

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

