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Mrs C Baron
Head Teacher
St Peter's Catholic Primary School
Horton Road
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Dear Mrs Baron

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 July 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to those who met me, including members of staff, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Since the last inspection the following contextual changes have taken place.

- Roles and responsibilities within the senior team have been reorganised.
- One teacher left the staff in the spring term 2010. Permanent appointments to replace this teacher and two others who are leaving at the end of the summer term have already been made for the next academic year. One teacher has reduced her contract from full-time to three days a week.
- The proportion of children who are at the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language is rising.
- Building work has started on a new Nursery, for completion by April 2011. Work on a new school building, to replace the current one, will start during the summer holidays, and is to be finished by March 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 9 December 2009, the school was asked to:

- increase the rate of progress that pupils make in mathematics and science from inadequate to at least satisfactory
- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better in the great majority of lessons
- develop the role of middle managers so that all become accountable for pupils' attainment and progress in their respective areas.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The headteacher and her senior team have managed to find an appropriate balance between intervention to improve outcomes for older pupils with a legacy of underachievement, and ensuring long-term, sustainable change to the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Since the last inspection the headteacher has created a culture where improving individual performance is the overriding priority for everyone in the school community – pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff and governors. Pupils are enthusiastic and very keen to learn. Among the staff there is an absolute commitment to pupils' achievement and a strong sense of mutual support. They say there is a sense of shared purpose and ambition. One member of non-teaching staff, describing how everyone understands the importance of their own role in making the school better, said that, 'Everyone wants the best for the school – we are a really strong team, all working towards the same thing'. Expectations of teachers are high and, throughout the visit, staff at all levels, from senior managers to teaching assistants, explained how they now feel accountable for what they do. Teachers demonstrated clearly that they are willing to accept constructive criticism and could describe ways in which their teaching had improved as result of advice and training.

Unvalidated results from national tests for Year 6 in 2010 show a substantial improvement in English and particularly in mathematics, where there was almost a 50% improvement on results in 2009. Teacher assessments in science also show an improvement. The progress that pupils made in Year 6 accelerated as a result of good-quality teaching. Those who were underachieving were identified early and well-targeted intervention put in place. The local authority provided support with small group work for some pupils, and some others received one-to-one help. The school now has a very rigorous system for tracking pupils' progress and has reliable data to show that pupils are making better progress overall, with particularly fast progress in mathematics in Year 2 and in science in Year 3. The school's own analysis in 2009 showed that although pupils in Year 6 made satisfactory progress in English, good reading skills masked inadequacies in writing. Improving writing skills has been a focus for the whole school and as result pupils have made better progress this year. The impact of training and rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching is evident from the improved progress pupils were making in lessons seen during the visit. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls, or of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, some of whom make good progress, especially in Year 6.

A wide range of professional development activities have been provided in order to improve the quality of teaching. The positive impact on the quality of pupils' learning is already evident as observations during the visit and the school's own monitoring show that there are now many good lessons and very few that are inadequate. Behaviour seen during the visit was always good or better because lessons were

generally happening at a good pace with a wide range of interesting activities to excite and stimulate pupils, which are generally well matched to their needs. When they are given the opportunity, pupils' enthusiastically take responsibility for their own learning, and many teachers are using higher-order questioning skills to stimulate pupils' thinking. Teachers are more regularly checking how well pupils are learning, although this is still variable. Pupils do, however, now have the vocabulary to talk about their learning, because they are encouraged to discuss it, particularly in English, mathematics and science. They willingly explain what they are doing and can generally describe, although not always in a subject-specific way, what they need to do in order to improve. Termly curricular targets are given to pupils but these are not renewed regularly enough, and so sometimes pupils forget them because they are no longer relevant to the topic in hand. Feedback through marking is much better than at the time of the last inspection but is still variable. Ideas to further challenge pupils are provided although this is done inconsistently, and even where they are provided, pupils are not always given time to act on the suggestions.

Termly, weekly and daily planning is carried out in supportive teams, and as a result can utilise a wider range of resources and ideas from different teachers. Sometimes, however, there is insufficient focus on arranging a sequence of different activities to ensure progression in learning. Although different resources are provided for pupils of different abilities, these are not always used as effectively as they could be. Sometimes more able pupils spend too long listening to the teacher when they could be pursuing their own work independently, or those who find the work more challenging are confused by the explanation provided for the rest of the class. Teaching assistants are enjoying the opportunity to take more responsibility for pupils' progress by running intervention groups in the afternoons. They found the recent mathematics day inspiring and it provided them with lots of ideas to use in the classroom.

Assessment systems are regular, well understood by everyone and checked comprehensively to ensure reliability. The data collected are analysed systematically and discussed at pupil progress meetings to identify where pupils are falling behind and where extra support needs to be provided. Teachers say that, 'you know where your children are', and this information is starting to be used more consistently for planning pupils' learning.

The development since the last inspection of the role of middle managers has been exceptional. Very rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching, through planning and book checks, lesson observation and analysis of pupils' progress, is now carried out by the three leaders of English, mathematics and science. Teachers are given individual feedback and generic summaries are used to plan for future training. An extensive professional development programme for teachers is in place and this is now beginning to be differentiated to meet individual teachers' needs. Middle leaders describe a deliberate leadership strategy where their responsibilities are made very clear, training and support are provided and they feel absolutely accountable for pupils' outcomes. One said, 'it's all about taking ownership'.

The headteacher and her team are energetically implementing a very clear, ambitious strategic plan which is shared with staff and constantly monitored and modified as priorities change. The plan has already led to a marked improvement in outcomes for pupils across the school, and especially for those in Year 6. The legacy of underachievement for pupils in Year 5 remains, and plans for intervention are already being implemented to ensure that their progress accelerates next year. For all staff, the pace of change has been very fast but as they see their efforts beginning to make a difference, they are feeling more confident and taking on more responsibility. Now that robust, sustainable systems are in place, the school is looking forward to a period of consolidation, to ensure that the improvements to the quality of teaching and thus pupils' achievement are maintained and have the capacity to develop further.

Governors are now visiting the school regularly, asking probing questions and taking an active role in supporting and challenging the school. Parents spoken to on the day of the visit reported that communication has improved through the weekly newsletter. They also said that their concerns are dealt with very effectively and quickly.

The school's single central record meets requirements.

The local authority's statement of action was evaluated prior to this visit and judged to meet requirements. The impact of its support is reflected in the positive outcomes since the last inspection. As part of the Improving Schools Programme, the school is receiving extensive support from a team of local authority advisors. The school has valued the helpful guidance they have provided for literacy, numeracy and Early Years, which is already having a positive impact on both the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. A new School Improvement Partner has made her first visit, and as a previous local authority advisor is already well known to the school. Curriculum leaders for mathematics and science from the local Catholic secondary school have helped to develop teaching skills, and have provided intervention sessions in science for pupils in Year 5.

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

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector