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8 October 2010

Mrs Kathy Blackledge
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Cedar Road
Chorley
Lancashire
PR6 0JF

Dear Mrs Blackledge

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

Thank you for the help that you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 October 2010, and for the information which you provided both before and during the course of my visit. Please also extend my thanks to the local authority, the governing body, and the staff and pupils with whom I spoke during the course of my visit.

Since the time of the last inspection the headteacher has left and, after initially serving as acting headteacher, the deputy headteacher was appointed as substantive headteacher in February 2010. There is currently no deputy headteacher, and the senior leadership team consists of the headteacher and two staff with teaching and learning responsibilities.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 November 2008, 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 **inadequate** progress in making improvements and **satisfactory** progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The judgement on progress is founded principally on the outcomes of national assessments and tests since the last inspection. Children enter the school with broadly average skills for their age. Despite a slight improvement in 2009, academic standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1 have remained broadly average. However, attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 2 have declined since the last inspection. Provisional test results for the 2010 Stage 2 national tests show decreases in the proportions of pupils attaining Level 4

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in English, mathematics and science. Those data also show increases in the proportions of pupils attaining the higher levels. Results at the higher level show an improvement to near national levels. Provisional progress measures show, however, that progress for that Year 6 group to be below corresponding national values, and again, below the progress measure for the 2008 cohort. In addition, the school acknowledges that interventions in the last academic year began too late to have a substantial impact on pupils' attainment and progress. The intervention strategy that began last month is driven by an enhanced tracking system, and by lessons learnt from the last academic year, and provides a framework for improvement.

The judgement of satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement stems from the stability that has been provided to the school and staff since the promotion of the deputy headteacher to the substantive headteacher position in February 2010. The headteacher has since provided clear leadership, which has included encouraging staff and partners to contribute to a realistic assessment of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Morale among staff is high and regular meetings between the headteacher and class teachers to establish pupils' progress in classes have led to staff taking on responsibility for their pupils' achievement. In addition, the greater engagement of members of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school, along with the sustained aid of the local authority, has developed a structure to build on the gains so far. These gains include the increased proportions of pupils attaining the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 2.

Increased challenge for higher-attaining pupils is evident in lesson planning, questioning, and differentiation by task and by outcome. Pupils from this group expressed the view that they found their lessons sufficiently stretching and that on the occasions they completed tasks, they were provided with more challenging work. However, lesson observations showed that the level of challenge was not consistent throughout the school, and the length of some starter sessions detracted from the time available for pupils at all levels to conduct independent and group work. In addition, while at the upper end of Key Stage 2 the quality of marking is varied to take appropriate account of pupils' abilities, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) found this less evident elsewhere in the school.

In terms of working on identified weaknesses, the school has improved its tracking regime, which indicates that the vast majority of pupils in the current Year 6 are likely to make expected progress by the end of this academic year. The school's self-assessment is accurate. The school's evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and marking accorded with the judgements made on these aspects by HMI. The strength of the school's own self-assessment is partly due to training provided by the local authority to middle leaders on this area, and partly to the shared nature of that process, with staff and stakeholders involved in drafting and challenging elements of the revised self-evaluation form. Nonetheless, the school's leaders and managers remain reliant on the support of the local authority in that the school, despite its best efforts, has yet to appoint a substantive deputy headteacher.

There has been a significant improvement in the role of subject leaders which supports the judgement of satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. Their training has enabled them to assess lesson planning accurately, engage in lesson observations and learning walks, work scrutiny and discussion with consultants. The enhanced involvement in leadership activities has improved morale and teamwork. However, these additional contributions and teamwork have yet to feed through to improvements in pupils' attainment and progress generally.

The local authority has provided effective support for the school since the November 2008 inspection. The training opportunities and consultancy work have served to provide a stable and supportive structure that has enabled the headteacher, in turn, to unlock the enthusiasm and teamwork of subject leaders and other staff. The local authority has also taken the critical role in securing an associate deputy headteacher, who is expected to start work this term.

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

Yours sincerely

Mike Hoban
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2008

- Provide more challenge in lessons and clearer guidance for more able pupils so that they achieve as well as they can.
- Take more robust action to address the weaknesses identified correctly by the school.
- Provide subject leaders with more opportunities to monitor standards and accelerate the rate of improvements.