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11 November 2010

Mrs J Walker
Headteacher
St James Catholic Primary School
Cheriton Close
Off Underwood Road
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Hyde
Cheshire
SK14 3DQ

Dear Mrs Walker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St James Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 November 2010, for the time you gave to our pre-inspection discussion and for the information which you provided during the visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the governors, staff and group of pupils who met with me, as well as those who were happy to speak with me around the school.

Since the last inspection there have been two teaching staff changes and a review of key responsibilities and leadership roles, including a change in the position of Chair of the Governing Body.

As a result of the inspection on 1 and 2 July 2009, 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:

satisfactory progress in making improvements
and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy their indoor and outdoor learning activities and continue to make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Pupils who entered Year 1 in September 2010 had also made good progress in their communication, language and literacy skills, although this was more

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positive for girls than boys. Progress in numeracy skills was weaker. The school is aware of this and is taking action, for example, to improve mathematics skills for that cohort in Year 1. From entry to the nursery, children are provided with appropriately planned activities to promote the development of their early literacy and numeracy skills. Children in the nursery respond well to clear routines that develop their independence and confidence, for example, when completing their 'tidying up' jobs while chatting happily to each other and the adults who support them.

Assessment data and its significance vary from year to year due to fluctuating numbers of pupils in each cohort. Results of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2010 were similar to the below average results of the previous year. Pupils' writing improved but the proportion achieving the typically expected 'secure or high level 2' in reading and mathematics was lower. At Key Stage 2, teacher assessments indicated a modest improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in English, mathematics and science, which was close to the national average overall.

The quality of pupils' learning and progress in lessons and over time is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. This is borne out in short observations of pupils' learning in classrooms and in scrutiny of their work during this inspection. The school is aware of the need to accelerate the pace of change and raise expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. A positive start has been made in improving procedures to monitor the quality of provision and involve staff and governors more fully. For example, the work of the governors' curriculum and standards committee is well supported by the headteacher and the English subject leader. This is making a good contribution to checking how well the school is tracking pupils' progress and identifying strengths and weaknesses, in particular, individuals or year groups. This information is being used well to target specific pupils for intervention programmes or additional support where it is needed. Class teachers are becoming more aware of their responsibilities in being accountable for the progress made by pupils in their class. Evaluations of the quality of teaching across the school are still largely carried out by the headteacher, although more staff are becoming involved in monitoring activities such as checking teachers' plans and pupils' work. There is therefore now a better aptitude to delegate more of the observation and evaluation activities to other leaders and staff as their skills are being developed. The school seeks opportunities for teachers to share ideas and learn from practice in other schools as well as their own. The School Improvement Partner and the leadership team are aware of the need to improve the quality of self-evaluation. This is not sufficiently focused on providing evidence of the impact of actions taken by the school on improving teaching and learning and raising attainment.

Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning continue to be a strong feature of the school's ethos, along with the very positive and caring relationships between adults and pupils. Teachers and support staff ensure that pupils know that their work and efforts are praised and valued, so that pupils are happy in school and confident to ask for help should they need it. Adults question pupils regularly to

check their understanding, but there is less use of open and challenging questions to probe pupils' deeper understanding and promote their thinking skills. This is also reflected in the variable quality and impact of teachers' marking in books. This does not always provide clear information to pupils about how well they are doing in relation to their specific targets or explain what they need to do to move their learning on to the next level. The school is aware of this and much work has been done to ensure that all staff have contributed to developing its vision for effective teaching, marking and assessment. This work is due to be reflected in a forthcoming review of the school's policies in these areas. Leaders are planning to use these agreed principles to monitor the consistency with which they are applied across the school.

Data on pupils' attendance show signs of improvement, although this is hard won and is necessarily an area of continued focus and determination. The school's appointment of a learning mentor has ensured that there is sufficient capacity for any pupil absences to be followed up very promptly and monitored regularly. Staff emphasise to pupils the importance of good attendance and punctuality so that they understand and are keen to achieve awards for this. The school works with local agencies to support its work with families to overcome barriers to good attendance.

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

Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2009

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science in Key Stages 1 and 2 and in literacy and numeracy in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve procedures to monitor the quality of provision, involving staff and governors more fully in the process.
- Develop the consistent use of individual learning targets and improve the quality and consistency of marking, so that pupils understand how well they are doing and so that they are always given clear advice on how to improve their work.
- Improve attendance to bring it in line with the national average figure for attendance.