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Mrs M Jones  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridgwater  
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Dear Mrs Jones

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridgwater**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 October, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff, parents and carers, the School Improvement Partner and the Chair of the Governing Body who met with me.

The characteristics of the school are much the same as at the previous inspection in March 2009. Since the inspection, at the request of the headteacher and the governing body the local authority has increased its level of support for the school. Two of the permanent members of staff were absent due to sickness at the time of the visit.

As a result of the inspection on 18 March 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.

Standards at the end of Year 6 and Year 2 have declined since the last inspection and are below average. Mathematics test results in 2010 for pupils in Year 6 improved as a result of additional teaching provided for groups of more able pupils and the good use of assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' prior learning. Writing test results declined and are low compared with national comparative data.

Pupils' lack of experience in writing confidently for a wide range of purposes attributed to disappointing results, despite efforts to close the gaps in their writing skills and the increased support for the less able pupils. The school's own assessments for current Year 6 pupils show an improving trend in reading attainment but no significant rising trend in writing or mathematics. The disruption to pupils' learning caused by staff absence and weaknesses in teaching persist in parts of the school and this is contributing to erratic and inadequate progress overall. Current work shows that pupils' skills in mathematics, writing and reading are being developed securely and systematically.

The quality of teaching has some effective features but lacks consistency from one class to the next. This is a similar picture to the situation at the last inspection. In a writing lesson where the explicit and well-rehearsed objectives were shared with pupils, the learning was rapid. Too often however, the purpose of the activity is unclear to pupils. While teachers' discussions with pupils reflect the positive relationships, the questioning and other forms of checking by teachers do not spur on learning. Pupils are attentive and enthusiastic because activities are mostly engaging and they have very positive attitudes. However, lesson plans are insufficiently rigorous in detailing the use of time and unclear about expectations for different ability groups. This leads to a lack of pace and focus on learning in lessons. The monitoring of teaching and learning has not had the desired outcome because it is irregular and is not focused sufficiently on the quality of learning. It is more concerned with checking that agreed actions are in place rather than evaluating the impact these are having on learners.

Much work has taken place to enhance the school's systems for assessment, although its impact on effective lesson planning is yet to be secured. The information from assessment, combined with the regular pupil progress meetings, is leading to a better understanding of what progress is expected from pupils and of what needs to be done to support each one to reach their targets. There is greater consistency in how teachers mark pupils' work. Pupils are unanimous that this has improved 'really well' and are motivated to set higher expectations of themselves. They are given feedback on their strengths as well prompts for their next steps, although it is not clear if pupils have gone back to act on these, particularly in mathematics.

The governing body have grown in effectiveness and have put into place appropriate systems for keeping the school under review. The governing body is asking the right questions and through their involvement in the 'values and vision' day are poised to become active in the strategic development plan. The current plan is not a helpful document for governors or school leaders and this is recognised by the school. The priorities are many and the timescales and sequencing are unclear. The success criteria are too general and the tools to measure the impact of the action are not in place to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation.

The school responded quickly to improve the partnership with parents. Parents and carers value the increased accessibility to discuss their child's progress with teachers both formally and informally. The workshops on how they can help their children with reading and mathematics are welcomed. A scrutiny of a recent parent and carer survey and pupils' progress reports shows that there are still inconsistencies in how teachers annually report progress. The inspector's attention was also drawn to the missed opportunity to report on pupils' targets on a regular basis through the homework diary.

The school is now receiving the highest level of local authority support. They have successfully brokered help for the headteacher and governing body in school evaluation and for assisting in moderating judgements about pupils' attainments. Consultants, working with middle leaders, are drawing up a plan to raise attainment and are advancing a revised strategic development plan and teaching and learning policy. This is helping to improve the capacity of middle leaders. The School Improvement Partner is coordinating this work and has a good understanding of what is required to sustain the emerging strengths but the inspection bears out the view that these are fragile. The uncertainties caused by recruitment difficulties and teacher absence provide considerable challenge to school leaders and managers to ensure a regular programme of robust monitoring of provision.

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

Jonathan Palk  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009**

- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning to promote greater consistency, and wider adoption of the best practice seen in the school, particularly to provide greater challenge for the more able pupils in mathematics and science.
- Use the emerging information from the assessment of pupils' progress and the marking of work to ensure that planned work fully meets their individual needs and that they are aware of how to improve their work.
- Ensure that all governors meet their responsibilities to offer both support and challenge to assist the school in raising pupils' achievement.
- Improve communication with parents, especially those of older pupils, to ensure that they are fully aware of their children's progress, and of the quality of the education they receive.