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Friday 30 September 2011

Mrs J Walling  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster  
Aldrens Lane  
Lancaster  
Lancashire  
LA1 2DU

Dear Mrs Walling

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 29 September 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

Since the last inspection four new class teachers have been appointed. The leadership team has changed. One senior leader was absent through sickness for a substantial part of 2010/11.

Recent building work to improve the Key Stage 1 building led to some disruption for younger pupils earlier this term but teachers have coped well with interim arrangements and ensuring that new classrooms provide a stimulating and welcoming environment.

As a result of the inspection on Monday 5 July 2010, 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.

Since the last inspection the school has continued the drive to improve the quality of teaching to improve rates of progress and attainment. The school now has a stable teaching staff team, most of whom have been in post for between six and eighteen months. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. Staff are tackling the lengthy historic legacy of underachievement and there are now clear strategies in place to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and deliver carefully planned and focused interventions to address these quickly. There is evidence of accelerating progress in some year groups, but this is not consistent. Where pupils have experienced weak teaching or many changes of class teacher in the past there remains some way to go to ensure that all pupils catch up. The data the school holds about individual progress are comprehensive and class teachers have good knowledge of individual needs which they make good use of in their planning,

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ensuring that work is tailored to ability. In the lessons visited teachers often made skilful use of questions to encourage pupils to think and work things out for themselves. Effective support was provided by teaching assistants. There were several examples of groups of pupils working productively and independently. In mathematics lessons pupils typically had a sound grasp of the methods in use and laid out their work clearly. Teachers' explanations were clear. Lessons included good opportunities for pupil involvement, for example, through questions and answers, talk partners and group work, and these effectively promoted pupil engagement and enjoyment. Behaviour has improved and was good in most of the lessons visited. Pupils typically display positive attitudes to learning. They are attentive, interested, keen to answer questions and tackle the work set conscientiously. Pupils who met with the inspector spoke with great enthusiasm about their learning, citing many different subjects that they particularly enjoy. All these features point to improving rates of progress on a day-to-day basis, but the legacy of underachievement has not been eliminated.

The overall standards of attainment reached by pupils by the end of Year 6 in 2011 were lower than in 2010 and the government floor target was not met. However, this cohort had lower prior attainment than the previous one and experienced some transience with several pupils joining or leaving during Years 5 and 6. Standards for the high proportion of Year 6 pupils known to be eligible for free school meals were significantly better in 2011 than in 2010 and were comparable with those found nationally. Although pupils' progress improved during Year 6, it was not rapid enough to compensate for weaknesses earlier during Key Stage 2. Standards at the end of Year 2 in 2011 were lower than in 2010. This was partly associated with the relatively low ability of the cohort and the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staffing difficulties also disrupted the teaching for much of the early part of the year. This has now been resolved.

The headteacher has displayed great resilience in steering the school through difficult times and many staff changes. She has been unstinting in her determination to bring about improvement, although it has taken some time to address staffing issues and establish a capable teaching team. Under her authoritative leadership teachers are now firmly focused on accelerating rates of pupil progress to ensure that increasing numbers reach age-related expectations. New appointments to the senior leadership team have strengthened leadership and management. The English and mathematics coordinators are increasingly involved in leading staff development activities and monitoring and evaluation, which show evidence of improvement, for example, in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. Intervention work is also carefully evaluated and adapted where it is not having enough impact. Careful deployment of teaching staff has been planned to maximise rates of progress where most needed. Improvement strategies are constantly reviewed and adapted. Progress tracking has been strengthened this year, with more frequent reviews of individual progress and increased use of short specific interventions.

Work to encourage more involvement of parents and to provide additional support for pupils who do not receive much at home, for example, in reading, are starting to pay dividends. There is a strong focus on reading throughout the school. The curriculum has been adapted to make it more engaging, to ensure that there are opportunities for practising literacy and

numeracy skills through other subjects and to raise awareness of cultural diversity. Pupils from different cultures have had the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers and their parents have also been involved. A visit to a local mosque enabled pupils to begin to develop their knowledge of another faith.

The local authority has provided good support through the work of advisers and consultants, as well as advice and guidance in dealing with staffing issues. The local authority is also helping the school by seeking potential candidates for the governing body, where there are a number of vacancies.

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

Ruth James  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on Monday 5 July 2010**

- Raise standards in all subjects and reduce inconsistencies in the rates of pupils' progress by:
  - adapting the curriculum to better meet the needs and interests of learners, especially the more able, through the introduction of more relevant topics and better links with pupils' prior experiences
  - improving the use of assessment information to inform teachers' and curriculum planning and to determine the most appropriate interventions when potential underachievement is identified
  - increasing the proportion of good or better teaching through continued monitoring of its impact on learning, providing opportunities to share best practice and ensuring that pupils are aptly challenged as well as supported
  - developing the role of subject and phase leaders in monitoring the impact of provision on learning, and ensuring opportunities for the promotion of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are provided.
  
- Develop pupils' cultural awareness and understanding of diversity issues by:
  - raising the profile of such issues across the school
  - adapting the curriculum
  - celebrating the diversity of culture in the school community.