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Mrs Hind
Headteacher
St Patrick's Catholic Primary School
Littledale Avenue
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LA3 2ER

Dear Mrs Hind

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 October 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am grateful to the chair of the governing body and the representative from the local authority for sparing the time to talk with me. It was a pleasure to speak to pupils, so please pass on my thanks to them also. Since the last inspection, there is a new chair and vice-chair of governors, four new members have joined the governing body and almost all of the teaching staff are new to the age groups they are teaching.

As a result of the inspection on 5 May 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Unvalidated results of the national assessments and tests in 2011 indicate that attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 is significantly lower than the national averages. Key Stage 2 data show an improvement in the levels pupils attained in mathematics and the school is pleased with these results. However, attainment in English has been steadily declining for the past five years. Attainment is currently significantly lower than expected with underperformance by all groups. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 remains stubbornly low with a declining trend. Furthermore, the rate of progress made by pupils is insufficient and has declined over time to below levels evident at the time of the previous inspection. Achievement for 2011 places the school below the minimum standards expected for primary schools. While it is acknowledged that, the school faces challenging circumstances and many pupils have a range of complex issues, attainment and progress have not increased enough and the school is falling short of providing pupils with the experiences they need to catch up

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with their learning. Current data held by the school indicate some successes in the progress made by some pupils. However, this is not consistent enough across the school.

Training has been delivered to staff supporting the raising of pupils' basic skills. 'Target time' has been introduced with an emphasis on promoting basic skills in English and mathematics. A new approach to homework has been adopted which focuses on pupils' next steps in their basic skills. Opportunities to write have increased and a focus on extending vocabulary is a priority for the school. However, there is little evidence of improvement in writing. Although gaps in learning are beginning to improve, levels of attainment still fall short of national expectations. The progress made in English remains insufficient, with only half of the Year 6 cohort in 2011 making progress in line with national expectations.

Improving pupils' ability to apply their mathematical calculation skills has been a priority for the school. Focus has been given to pupils knowing their times tables and mathematical lessons on Fridays are devoted to investigations. Although pupils talk positively about mathematics having a greater purpose, it is too early to monitor the impact of this work. Data held internally show some pupils making accelerated progress in mathematics, but still too few are making the progress expected. For example, over half the cohort in one class last year made lower than average progress. At the present time, teaching is not strong enough to accelerate progress to ensure pupils catch up and close the gaps in their learning.

The headteacher recognises that provision is still undeveloped across the school even though clear criteria are used to judge the quality of teaching. She is more focused on ensuring pupils reach age-related expectations and is fully aware of what constitutes effective learning. While the headteacher reports an improving picture of teaching and learning, this was not evident during the inspection. Lessons observed by the inspector did not fully match activities to the needs of pupils. Too often pupils were given tasks that neither extended the higher ability pupils nor supported those of lower ability. Although teaching assistants provided some effective guidance, this was not consistently applied and opportunities were missed to develop and support learning.

Pupils talk positively about involvement in assessing their own learning. Marking ladders are used to encourage pupils to check their learning and assess their successes. Pupils report they are given time to read teachers' comments and act upon them. However, this is not consistently applied across all classes and subjects. Pupils rightly comment they are given more guidance in English and mathematics. A new policy for marking pupils' work is adopted but not consistently implemented by all staff. Some pupils' work remains unmarked.

Staff training has been delivered to identify basic skills in all subjects. Staff are developing their understanding of skills progression and are improving their creative approach to learning. Theme weeks are popular and enthuse both pupils and teachers. There remains little evidence, however, of the impact of this new way of working on levels of achievement. The way in which teachers plan lessons has been redefined. However, there was little evidence during the inspection of this being used consistently by all staff. Too often planning was not tailored to the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils.

Work has developed to forge closer links with parents and carers. The new homework scheme is ensuring they have a greater role in helping their children learn. Set routines are supporting parents and carers in fostering a value of education. Furthermore, the school has joined a local project which supports adult and child well-being. It provides guidance for parents and carers whose children have complex difficulties. Staff in school have received training to work alongside families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Newsletters now better inform parents and carers of events and provide advice on how to support their child's learning. Workshops for parents and carers have been delivered but are not well attended. New links have developed with the local college to help adults develop their basic skills.

The headteacher is fully aware that there is still more to do to improve achievement. Monitoring of individual pupils shows each pupil is well known to the school and contextual factors with regards to circumstances are acted upon. Although the headteacher is determined to raise outcomes across the school, there remains insufficient support from middle leaders to ensure outcomes improve rapidly. Plans are in place for their roles to develop but currently there is little evidence of their work having an impact across the school. The chair of the governing body is knowledgeable and understands the strengths and areas the school needs to develop urgently. A new committee has very recently been established to monitor and evaluate the school's actions on raising achievement. The headteacher has embraced the support from the local authority, although it remains in its early stages. The local authority's monitoring and intervention team is working closely with the school, focusing on raising achievement and improving the quality of provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010.

- Raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics, by:
 - extending pupils' vocabulary to enliven their writing and provide further opportunities to write purposefully in different styles across the curriculum
 - improving pupils' ability in applying their mathematical calculation skills to solve real-life number problems.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers are more consistent in matching work in lessons to the needs of pupils
 - involving pupils fully in assessing for themselves how well they are doing and how they might improve
 - developing stronger links between subjects.
- Strengthen the school's engagement with parents and carers in order to better help them to support their children's learning.