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16 November 2011

Mr T Naylor  
Headteacher  
St Francis of Assisi RC Primary School  
Blakehall  
Skelmersdale  
Lancashire  
WN8 9AZ

Dear Mr Naylor,

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Francis of Assisi RC Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 November 2011 and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to the senior leadership team and the English and mathematics leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, the five parents and the seven pupils, as well as the representative from the local authority, all of whom spent time speaking with me.

Since the inspection of June 2010 there have been a number of significant changes in the school, not least in the appointment of a permanent headteacher from September 2011. Also since September 2011 a newly qualified teacher and a number of teaching assistants have been appointed. In addition, classes in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 have been reorganised to allow for the teaching of English and mathematics in learning groups during the morning.

As a result of the inspection of June 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 good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The steady rise in the attainment of pupils across Key Stage 1 has continued. In 2011, the standards of attainment reached by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics rose so that while they are below average they are, for the first time in a number of years, no longer low. By contrast, standards attained by pupils in Year 6 dipped in 2011, particularly so in mathematics. The school's own accurate records of assessment continue to show that the standards attained by pupils across the school represent broadly satisfactory progress from their starting points. As a result of the rises in Key Stage 1 and the dip in Year 6 the school's leaders have put into place a number of actions and initiatives with the intention of

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improving achievement overall. These include, utilising the increased funding the school has available, the re-organisation of the morning timetable in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 to allow for the focused teaching of the basic skills in smaller groups and the provision of teaching assistant support for pupils in the three classes encompassing Years 3 and 4. Such steps, already paying dividends, confirm the school's good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The overall plans for improvement put into place by leaders and the governing body are clear and appropriate, although leaders agree they need to be more specific about the intended outcomes for pupils.

The quality of teaching is improving and is most noticeably evidenced by the range, rigour and depth of teachers' questioning. This has resulted in pupils being better able to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing. Good quality questioning was observed in a number of lessons allowing pupils, for example, to consider how they would construct letters of apology to 'The Little Red Hen', give examples of the differences between biographical and autobiographical writing, and recognise sounds in words containing two and three letters. Sometimes, though, pupils are not given sufficient time following questioning to give as full a response as possible. Likewise, while there is a clear and sustained focus on writing in English lessons, opportunities to reinforce what has been taught in other subjects are limited. This is because some activities just involve filling in missing words, completing worksheets and, on occasions, colouring in. The completion of lists of questions and colouring in was also evident in pupils' work in mathematics. The quality of teachers' marking of pupils' work is improving with more that is helping pupils to identify the next steps to take in their learning. Not all marking is as consistently helpful, although it is positive in comment. Likewise, while there is a more rigorous approach to assessing what pupils can do, this information is not always translated into planning and teaching. In addition, the progress made by individual pupils is not referenced against the targets set for those pupils.

The school has benefitted from good levels of support and challenge from both the Archdiocese and the local authority. Previous issues relating to staffing have been resolved. Parents and carers spoken with have appreciated this increased stability and were highly positive about the school. Pupils were equally positive and showed pride in their school. Leaders, as a result of reducing the number of persistent absentees and adopting a firm stance on holidays taken in term time, have secured improvements in pupils' attendance. The new headteacher has continued his predecessor's work by ensuring staff keep their focus on improving outcomes for pupils; the sense of the staff and governing body's commitment to the school and its pupils was tangible during this monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mark Williams  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010**

- Improve the rate of pupils' progress and accelerate learning across Key Stage 1 by:
  - making more effective use of assessment information to match learning activities to pupils' needs
  - regular and rigorous monitoring of pupils' work to ensure that all are progressing well
  - ensuring that pupils are clear about what they have to do to improve.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school by:
  - implementing a planned and consistent approach to developing pupils' skills at listening
  - developing the range, rigour and depth of teachers' questioning
  - extending opportunities for pupils to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing.