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Mrs P Longmire
The Headteacher
St Mary Magdalene's Catholic Primary School
Hastings Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN40 2ND

Dear Mrs Longmire

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils and staff who met with me, to the chair of governors and to the advisor from the local authority (LA) for the time they gave.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 June 2007, the school was asked to:

- raise pupils' standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching across the school
- provide better academic guidance to ensure that all pupils, particularly the more able, are properly challenged
- develop the roles of middle managers
- improve teachers' management of behaviour
- reduce the school's debt.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The most important change since the inspection has been the appointment of a new headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. Since September the revitalised leadership team, with good support from LA colleagues, has worked hard to pull the school team together and move it in the right direction. The roles and expectations of subject leaders, some of whom are relatively new to their roles, have been clarified and strengthened. Local authority consultants have worked intensively alongside the mathematics leaders and, as a result, they are now well placed to carry out their roles effectively and independently. Similar coaching is planned to ensure that all subjects are equally well managed.

The school has made good use of monitoring, training and sharing of good practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. The impact of this work can be seen in the rising proportion of good mathematics lessons. Consistently used assessment systems ensure that teachers have a much clearer idea of what pupils can do and what progress they should be making. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which are shared and revisited so that everyone knows what successful learning will look like and whether it has been achieved. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils who need additional help and there is good challenge in lessons to extend the learning of the more able. In some lessons there are missed opportunities for pupils to play a more active and independent role, discussing and thinking through their learning with each other.

The quality of feedback and marking is variable, but improving, and there are examples of very good marking in mathematics which involve the pupils in a dialogue about their own learning. Pupils know their targets for reading, writing and mathematics and these are reviewed regularly to identify pupils who are not making expected progress and make sure they receive appropriate support. The school is well aware that despite recent improvements, pupils' progress is still patchy and there is a lot of ground to make up if pupils are to achieve their potential.

A consistent approach to behaviour management is now in place throughout the school. Pupils and staff comment on the improvements in behaviour and there have been no exclusions since July. Pupils respond well to the rewards and sanctions. They are courteous and behave well. In some situations behaviour management becomes rather over directed and this limits the development of pupils' personal responsibility and self discipline.

The issue of the school's budget was not inspected in detail during this visit but the evidence provided indicates that the school and LA are working closely together and plan for the school to be in credit by 2009.

The LA is carrying out its support, monitoring and evaluation roles very well. Advisors and consultants work well in partnership with the school to address the areas identified for improvement in a well managed and timely fashion.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector