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Mrs L Howell  
The Acting Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Howell

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 18 September, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Could you also pass my thanks to the governors and pupils for their contributions?

Since the school was inspected on 5 and 6 February 2008 some new staff have been appointed, including leaders for English and mathematics who also have responsibility for pupils in the infant and junior phases of the school.

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 5 and 6 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that all subjects, including science, are taught regularly so that pupils are helped to build on what they have learnt before and standards are raised
- provide more thorough guidance to pupils through marking and target setting so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to do better
- regularise leadership and management arrangements to assure stability to the school and alleviate parents' concerns.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress.

Analysis of pupils' writing books, as well as observations of pupils' learning in lessons, confirms the improvement in standards indicated by the 2008 national tests

taken by Year 6 pupils. The assessments at the end of Year 2 also point to a significant improvement in standards. Effective teaching, improvements to the curriculum, and interventions in Year 2 and Year 6 were mainly responsible for this improvement. The school now has a much more reliable approach to the tracking of pupil progress and is setting ambitious targets. Far more pupils in every year group are making better progress, although for many pupils this is not yet sufficient to overcome a quite long period during which too little progress was made.

The school's analysis of the science test papers in 2007 indicated that key aspects of the science curriculum had not been given sufficient attention. In response to this, changes were made to the Year 6 curriculum to include much more science teaching. This has resulted in improved science test results. Leaders are ensuring that science is now being taught much more consistently throughout the school so that in future Year 6 can experience a more balanced curriculum. The curriculum has also been improved through an increased number of educational visits linked to studies in school. Pupils spoke of how excited they were to undertake a transport topic following a visit to an RAF air base. The school is now planning more theme based approaches that inspire and motivate staff and pupils. There are signs that literacy and numeracy skills are now being reinforced through other subjects.

All pupils have challenging targets and these are understood well by older pupils who demonstrated an ability to improve their writing independently to achieve their individual targets. There has been more limited progress improving the use of assessment and ensuring pupils receive the guidance they need to reach their targets. In only a couple of the lessons seen were teachers able to ensure that pupils of all abilities could achieve well. Although planning is more consistent, the objectives tend to be overly pitched at pupils of average ability. There is insufficient attention given to meeting the needs of individuals. All of the lessons observed included a range of activities to broadly meet the needs of the full ability range. However, too often during introductions and especially during the latter stages of lessons, teachers did not effectively develop the learning appropriate to lower and higher ability pupils. The school has recognised this weakness and is currently further developing its planning so that the progress made by pupils of different ability is more clearly identified. Lessons observed and comments made by pupils suggest strategies to ensure all pupils work at good pace are not consistently used. However, in the best lessons pupils enjoyed the challenge of trying to achieve their targets. Teaching assistants are used well most of the time, but there are times when teachers talk for too long and miss opportunities to intersperse this with opportunities for pupils to discuss key ideas. At these times pupil concentration wanes and it is difficult for teaching assistants to provide effective support.

Although inconsistencies remain, there were some examples of marking that did provide guidance to pupils on how they could improve. There was an example of particularly good practice in which pupils had to indicate how they were responding to a teacher's comments.

The school still does not have a permanent headteacher, or deputy. The school's governors have made several attempts to make permanent appointments to these posts. Governors, the local authority and the headteacher have developed plans to minimize the impact of the uncertainty associated with the difficulties making these appointments. Nevertheless, leadership is more stable, largely because the school has had the same headteacher for a much longer period than was the case previously. The headteacher is providing strong leadership and is building an effective team. Most staff are no longer temporary. The curriculum has improved as a result of much better monitoring. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and plans are implemented in light of this knowledge. New colleagues have quickly identified the right priorities. This suggests improvement may, in the future, be less reliant on the headteacher.

The local authority action plan is ensuring the school receives timely support. The support of the school's advisor is particularly valued by staff. The advisor has been instrumental in ensuring the school is developing the plans to further improve teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick  
Her Majesty's Inspector