

16 January 2009

Mrs Diane Gallagher
Headteacher
St Maria Goretti Catholic Primary School
Gamull Lane
Ribbleton
Preston
Lancashire
PR2 6SJ

Dear Mrs Gallagher

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 15 January 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

Since the inspection a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. She took up her post in January 2009. Three class teachers have left and been replaced.

As a result of the inspection in April 2008, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science for all groups of pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of subject leadership and middle management.
- Make better use of assessment information to plan work which meets the needs of all abilities and provides the pupils with guidance on how to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' attendance.
- Review curriculum provision to ensure continuity and progression of skills.

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.

Standards remain below average but they are showing improvement, especially at Key Stage 2. Pupils sat national tests a few weeks after the inspection in April 2008. Unvalidated test results show that at Key Stage 2 there was an improvement on 2007 results in the proportions of pupils gaining the expected level in English, mathematics and science. In English, although more pupils reached this level than in

2007, the proportion remained well below average. Fewer pupils achieved above expected levels than in 2007. No pupils achieved Level 5 in English or science and only a small proportion did so in mathematics. A number of school targets were not met. Overall standards at Key Stage 1 remained well below average and slightly lower than in 2007, particularly for White British children and those receiving free school meals.

Since the inspection the school has put in place a number of strategies to raise achievement and standards and these are now starting to have an impact. The school's systems for assessment are much improved, and pupils are assessed regularly in literacy and numeracy. Progress is tracked effectively. The school's data and analysis for current pupils provide information about individual pupil and cohort performance, and this shows that the majority of pupils are now making better progress. Ambitious individual targets have been set, based on accelerated rates of progress and there are many examples of individual pupils making this rapid progress and catching up effectively, particularly in reading. However, this is not consistent across all classes and there remains some way to go for all pupils to catch up, especially in writing. Progress is generally better for Years 4, 5 and 6. Intervention strategies are being put in place where tracking data show that pupils are not making at least satisfactory progress.

Attendance has improved and is now closer to the national average. Punctuality has also improved. The headteacher has worked hard to ensure that school is a place children enjoy coming to. Pupils spoken to during the inspection all said they enjoyed school. A range of rewards have been introduced to promote attendance. There remain a small number of children whose attendance is poor, and the school is working with their families to encourage attendance.

Teachers are now planning work to meet the different needs of individuals, and are making better use of assessment information. In lessons there are clear learning objectives and success criteria. Behaviour is generally managed very well in lessons. More imaginative teaching approaches and interactive materials help to engage and motivate so that pupils enjoy learning more. Pupils are keen to learn. Although teacher expectations are now higher, the more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to reach the higher levels of which they are capable. Some marking gives pupils guidance on how they might improve their work but this is not consistent across all classes.

There are signs of some improvement to the curriculum. The headteacher has taken responsibility for the whole school overview. The range of enrichment activities has improved and themed weeks provide many opportunities to engage interest, through the use of outside visitors for example. These are valued by the children. All staff have produced half-termly maps with cross curricular themes that span a range of subjects. There is some evidence of the development of literacy and numeracy skills through other subjects but this remains an area for improvement. The science coordinator has begun to tackle some of the issues in science. For example, the

sequencing of work has been amended to ensure progression in the teaching of skills. Sharper and more focussed assessment is planned.

The strong leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental in ensuring that the school moves forward. As a calm, authoritative presence she leads her team of committed and hard working staff effectively, focusing on raising achievement. Staffing difficulties have been addressed and relationships are positive across the school. A range of initiatives have been introduced which are benefiting pupils. For example, the reading recovery programme has had significant success in a short space of time. New core subject leaders have been appointed and have begun to monitor their subject areas, for example through scrutinising weekly planning. It is too early to assess the full impact of their work but there is clear recognition of the need for further improvement. Self-evaluation is now better embedded and involves core subject leaders as well as senior managers. This is leading to better identification of issues to be addressed. Performance management objectives are linked with the school's priorities.

The local authority (LA) rightly acknowledged a declining trend in the school's performance prior to the inspection and already had in place a series of measures to support the school to tackle identified weaknesses. The local authority's statement of action includes appropriate support for the school in addressing the issues identified by the inspection. An associate deputy headteacher was appointed for the autumn term 2008, prior to the new deputy taking up her post. Funding to allow the small Year 1 group to be taught as a separate class was also provided, to help accelerate the progress of these pupils. Primary consultants and advisers have worked closely with the school, and staff value the guidance and support they have received. Training has been provided for subject coordinators and more is planned. Opportunities for staff development have been readily taken up by teachers. The LA has also supported the school in dealing with personnel issues.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector