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Miss Jane Burke  
The Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic and CofE Primary School (VA)  
Calver Crescent  
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Dear Miss Burke

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you, your staff, the chair of governors and local authority advisor gave when I inspected your school on 4 December, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 21 and 22 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- Ensure that the newly formed Governing Body effectively holds the school to account and provides the necessary challenge and leadership. Ensure that a sharp, incisive school development plan drives accountabilities and is monitored frequently.
- Make sure that leaders and managers set clear direction in all of their areas of responsibility, with robust systems of monitoring and evaluating in place, accurately informing self-evaluation and leading to whole school improvement.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by adapting work better and including activities to stimulate pupils and improve their thinking skills.
- Iron out the differences in teaching and learning across the school so that each child achieves as well as they can and makes consistent progress.

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' achievements.

The governing body is aware that it did not hold the school sufficiently to account at the time of the last inspection. Governors have reviewed their role and have recognised the need to improve the way they monitor and evaluate the work of the school and the way in which they challenge staff to raise standards. They are more closely involved in the school through regular visits and are beginning to gather sufficient information to have a more thorough understanding of the school's effectiveness. They have developed some sound procedures for checking the school's work so that they are able to hold the school to account. An appropriate range of training has been undertaken and all governors are well equipped for their roles. The school improvement plan has been revised and now has a sharper focus on improving pupils' outcomes and is monitored regularly by the governing body.

Satisfactory progress has been made in strengthening the monitoring and evaluating roles of subject leaders. They now conduct regular lesson observations and give focused written feedback on teaching. They also scrutinise pupils' work and monitor teachers' planning. However, there is scope for extending the role further to include more robust evaluation of pupils' learning. All these activities are worthwhile and provide helpful evidence on the quality of provision to inform development planning. Procedures for involving subject leaders and governors in self-evaluation have improved since the last inspection. Consequently, self-evaluation is generally accurate, resulting in a more clearly prioritised development plan. However, there is a tendency to tackle too many issues at once. The present action plans are not sufficiently focused on identifying staff development needs and the steps that need to be taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

A satisfactory start has been made to improving the quality of the curriculum. There is appropriate emphasis on teaching the basic skills through a topic based approach, with more flexible use of the timetable. The curriculum is suitably modified to meet the learning needs of lower-attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties. However, more able pupils are too rarely provided with the additional challenge they need or required to work independently so they develop their thinking and problem solving skills. The school is aware of the need to develop a more creative, rich and challenging curriculum and makes effective use of some special events, such as 'Themed Weeks', to add interest and enjoyment. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources are being used more widely to develop links between subjects. Although there is some effective use made of interactive white boards, this is not consistent throughout the school.

Satisfactory progress has been made with improving consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. The teaching observed during this visit matched the headteacher's evaluation and is satisfactory overall. Pupils were generally enthusiastic in lessons although a small number in some classes did not contribute to whole class discussion, lost concentration, and failed to listen carefully enough. Relationships were mostly good. In one good lesson, the teacher inspired pupils through an exciting, whole class shared reading activity. The teacher used good questioning skills to check understanding, as well as impromptu drama moments to bring the story alive. Pupils worked best where they were encouraged to think about

what they were doing and to make decisions. However, teacher expectations are not high enough in some lessons. An examination of current pupils' work reveals some variability in the progress being made by higher attaining pupils in different classes, with the result that not all of these pupils are fulfilling their potential.

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

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy Bathgate  
Her Majesty's Inspector