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Mrs Juliet Walling
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC Primary School
Aldrens Lane
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Dear Mrs Walling

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 1 December 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. It was very helpful to meet with groups of pupils, the chair of governors and the school's local authority advisor. Please pass on my thanks to them. It was especially beneficial that you and I could observe lessons and analyse assessment and monitoring information together.

Since the school was inspected in April 2009 there have been significant staffing changes. An associate deputy headteacher has joined the school on a temporary basis as part of the local authority support programme. One senior leader has left. A new co-ordinator for special educational needs has been appointed. There have been other changes to staff employment contracts, particularly those for teaching assistants, as a result of financial constraints. The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen slightly.

As a result of the inspection on 29 and 30 April 2009, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve progress by identifying and meeting pupils' learning needs
- improve teaching by ensuring all teachers' expectations of pupils of differing abilities are sufficiently high, challenging pupils appropriately and developing pupils' independent learning skills
- rigorously use pupil progress tracking information to identify and support those making inadequate progress
- ensure that all pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and supported appropriately.

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

The headteacher has made many appropriate improvements to school systems, especially for identifying and addressing underachievement, strengthening processes to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and holding teachers to account for pupil achievement. However, the changes have had limited positive impact on pupils' achievement as a result of the staffing issues and the consequent slower development of team working. Standards remain low and pupils' progress is still too slow.

Pupils' results in the 2009 unvalidated national assessment tests show overall standards continued to decline at the end of Key Stage 1 despite some improvement in mathematics and reading. The decline in overall standards was halted at the end of Key Stage 2 as a result of some improvements in English. However, the progress made by pupils in relation to their starting points remained significantly below average. Although the school's own teacher assessment data showed some improvement in reading and mathematics during the summer term, progress made in improving pupils' writing was too inconsistent between classes. Analysis of pupils' writing in the autumn term again shows that progress has been limited, with a small minority of pupils in several classes having lost ground.

The headteacher has ensured that the school is increasingly rich in data about pupils' achievement through development of the tracking system. Good training is ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are increasingly accurate and they are now better placed to monitor and evaluate the impact of changes to provision on outcomes for pupils. As a result, leaders and managers have better information about the way pupils learn and where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Regular pupil progress meetings are now effectively identifying pupils who are underachieving and making clear to staff what changes to provision will be needed to better support pupils' progress. Teachers are now aptly expected to use the information to ensure that the learning needs of pupils of all abilities are met and their independent learning skills are developed. An additional expectation is that teachers will guide teaching assistants in their work with specific individuals or groups of pupils. However, inspection evidence corroborates internal monitoring evidence showing that although teachers are more aware of assessment information, they do not all consistently use it well to plan tasks to promote pupil progress for all groups. Teaching assistants work effectively with pupils who have a statement of special educational needs. They provide good encouragement to lower attaining pupils to help them to complete tasks. However, teachers do not always plan activities for these groups that are well designed to promote pupils' independence.

The emerging strengths in teaching at the time of the last inspection have not been developed sufficiently well and the weaker aspects identified persist. This is despite intensive professional development and coaching. These are the most significant reasons why success in accelerating rates of progress and helping underachieving pupils to catch up has been limited. Marking is thorough but in some classes is not sufficiently focused on identifying what pupils have done well and what their next learning step should be. Neither is marking sufficiently well linked to pupils' targets. Consequently pupils are confused about how targets should be used. Teachers' questioning skills are not strong enough to enable them to assess the quality of pupils' individual learning in lessons or to probe and extend learning. Strengths seen in teaching help to explain why pupils say they are happy in school. Relationships are warm and positive; behaviour is good and one to one interventions encourage pupils well.

The new co-ordinator for special educational needs works effectively with the headteacher and the specialist local authority adviser. Good use is made of progress tracking data. Rapid improvements to systems for the early identification of and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have been achieved. More pupils have individual education plans that meet their needs as a result of staff training. The impact of these improvements on the progress made by the pupils is variable and is closely linked to the quality of teaching.

The local authority statement of action meets requirements. The range of advisers and specialist professionals working in the school and the guidance provided for governors about staffing issues have supported the headteacher in following appropriate improvement strategies.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector