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Mrs M Woolaway
Headteacher
Our Lady's RC Primary School
Boycott Road
Hereford
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Dear Mrs Woolaway

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 20 October 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also thank the two governors that I met, your Year 6 pupils for their helpful and enthusiastic contributions, and the two local authority officers.

There have been no substantial changes in the circumstances of the school since the previous inspection. That stability is in welcome contrast to a period of considerable staff changeover earlier in the academic year.

As a result of the inspection on 24 March 2009, the school was asked to:

- Accelerate the pupils' progress and raise standards.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching by ensuring that pupils' differing needs are consistently being met well in all classes and ensure that teachers make better use of marking and setting targets to help pupils know how they can improve their work.
- Improve the way information on pupils' progress is recorded and evaluated so that leaders have a clear knowledge of the relative progress of various groups of pupils and can act swiftly to remedy weaknesses in provision.

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.

Pupils took National standard assessments tests (SATs) five school weeks after the inspection in March. In that short time, the school was not able to effect significant



improvement in standards, which according to provisional results remained low for the Year 2 and Year 6 pupils of that academic year. The results indicated inadequate progress by Year 6 pupils. Since the inspection, however, the school has made considerable improvements to provision that are beginning to show in the standards of work seen in pupils books during my visit. The most substantial development has been the launch of an intensive programme of literacy teaching and learning, known commercially as 'Read Write Incorporated (RWI)'. The impact is most apparent in the enjoyment and enthusiasm of pupils for studying literacy, as they come to experience improvements in their reading and writing. Written work seen at this visit was broadly in line with age related expectations. Notably, the quantity of written work across all subjects was high, confirming the intense focus on practicing writing as often as possible. Pupils were so positive about their schoolwork that they thought they could do even more by way of extra study out of school.

During my visit I saw different parts of lessons from Key Stage 2. All the teaching I saw was securely satisfactory with much that was good. Planning takes into account the differing prior attainment of pupils, and there is evidence of teachers adapting daily plans as they assess lesson-by-lesson progress during the week. The best teaching required all pupils to participate at a high pace. There are very good teacher-pupil relationships that foster inquisitiveness, and encourage children to ask astute questions. Sometimes, although the academic demand was well matched to pupil ability, the more mundane aspects of recording the work caused a reduction in pace. For example, a lesson where pupils were asked to classify shapes into different groups was pitched appropriately, so that more able pupils had quite difficult shapes to identify using criteria selected by the pupils. Less able pupils were trying to distinguish between five and six sided shapes, which they were managing well with sensitive support for a classroom assistant. However, to note the different shapes, they had to shade them in different colours; this they did carefully, neatly, and very slowly! Their pace through the lesson was limited by their colouring skills, not their mathematical abilities.

Marking is thorough, frequent, praises good work and identifies areas for improvement. However, except in Year 6, pupils are not routinely required to act upon the advice to improve by correcting or repeating work. Some comments are very difficult for pupils to follow through, such as 'be careful with your spelling'. Most pupils do not deliberately misspell, so will not realise they have incorrectly spelt a word in the first place. Pupils have clear, short-term targets about areas of knowledge they need to develop next. These are set at the ability of a group of pupils, and then individually adapted for each pupil. Year 6 pupils knew these personal targets off by heart. Pupils are also well aware of the level of challenge being made upon them. One pupil noted that 'I enjoy all of my maths lessons because I get all of my answers right!'. That might suggest the pupil is not quite at the very limit of their ability yet.

The school has an electronic pupil progress tracking system in place, and it does show that the majority of pupils are now making the expected progress, term by



term, in all year groups. This system gives managers the necessary information to monitor every pupil, and therefore direct intervention where progress slips. Several strategies are now in place to boost progress. Many students are at an early stage of learning English. The school now has effective support for these pupils in place.

Governors, and the local authority, independently noted that pupil attitudes and behaviour had improved substantially in recent months. They pointed out that this was the primary focus for the new senior leadership team that was appointed about 18 months ago. The local authority's statement of action was satisfactory. They have helped the school to construct raising achievement plans. They catalogue and schedule actions the school and local authority are taking. It contains some long-term targets for pupil attainment. There is some uncertainty surrounding how those targets were generated, and whether they have taken account of the context of the school and the predicted progress of individual pupils. The local authority is providing useful practical support through advisory staff visits. It holds regular formal meetings to note progress against the key issues, but the formal notes from these meetings contain very little evaluation of that progress. Recently, the frequency of visit by the school improvement partner has increased, and her input is helping to further improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation.

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

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

