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Miss J Chwastek  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Woodford Lane  
Winsford  
Cheshire  
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Dear Miss Chwastek

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 February 2010, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 3 and 4 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure a broad and balanced curriculum in which all subjects are taught in appropriate depth
- improve the range of teaching methods to increase pupils' engagement and enjoyment
- develop the role and impact of subject leaders
- use specific subject support to improve teachers' capacity to teach all subjects of the curriculum.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

good progress in making improvements and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The last inspection showed that the school had concentrated successfully on raising standards in the core subjects. This, however, was judged to have been at the expense of providing a broad and balanced curriculum. The school has since taken a thoughtful and strategic approach to improving breadth and balance. Using excellent



procedures for improvement planning, it has designed an imaginative and interesting new curriculum. This covers all core and foundation subjects, together with some others, which are taught in a closely interrelated way. Subject skills have been analysed in depth and they are increasingly learned in a progressive way through themes and key questions chosen to capture the imagination of the pupils: their strong interest in these themes was clear in the lessons observed. The positive influence of the curriculum on their good behaviour was also clear. Efforts to increase the impact on learning of trips to external places with specialist resources are paying dividends, both in motivating pupils and in deepening their learning. This is well supported by residential trips and by specialist visitors to the school, such as an artist seen working with pupils in Year 6. The school has made intelligent use of external training courses to support this development of the curriculum. Lessons learned here have been well absorbed by staff through regular meetings and curriculum development projects. Staff rightly believe that the improved curriculum is deepening learning. Pupils are well motivated by the provision; their views and interests are taken into account as staff continue to develop it. External evaluation has been positive. Senior leaders have a very clear vision of, and the burning ambition to secure, their desired curriculum.

Staff have made similarly clear improvements to the range and interesting nature of the teaching methods they use. Guided by the headteacher, staff have considered the characteristics of good teaching. Senior leaders, with the help of the subject leaders, have formed a clear understanding of how effective the teaching is overall. Plans have been drawn up to strengthen this further through a meticulously organised programme of specialist lesson observations. A key aim has been to increase pupils' activity in lessons, together with their responsibility for their own learning. The lessons seen showed ample evidence of carefully planned practical activity throughout the school. The pupils were clearly well engaged by this and behaved in a very responsible way when working independently and cooperatively in groups. Diligent lesson planning has promoted the use of interesting activities to help pupils to make connections between subjects. Assessment is more closely used to track pupils' progress and to help teachers plan lessons to help pupils build well on their previous learning.

The deployment of subject leaders has been clarified and their impact strengthened. All subjects have a leader and a concise and pertinent development plan. Drawing up these plans, reviewing the skills to be taught and evaluating the current impact of provision have helped leaders to clarify their insight into the quality of subject provision throughout the school. Coordinators say they have the necessary authority within the school to carry out their management duties and that they benefit from the cooperation and support of staff when, for example, implementing new procedures. Staff welcome their practical suggestions for improving their coverage of subjects. This is 'work in progress' and the school stresses the responsibility of subject leaders as an important part of its wider campaign to strengthen the curriculum and its teaching. There is a general view within the school that, though improvements in subject and curriculum development initially created more work for

staff, the result has been worthwhile in securing better learning and motivation among pupils and a greater capacity to build and sustain improvement.

Various members of staff have benefited from specific subject support. In personal, social and health education, for example, expert advice from the local authority has been combined with cooperative development among staff to extend the curriculum. The school acknowledges that, though much has improved, strengthening the subject expertise of staff is 'work in progress'. It is well equipped to achieve this by securing specific developments among staff as and when these are needed to implement aspects of the improving curriculum.

The local authority provided effective and intensive support in the early days of improvement when the onus was on raising standards in the core subjects. Much was achieved in this and since then the school has used a variety of external support to widen its efforts to improve. These have been successful, especially when external training on the curriculum has been attended by the senior leaders and then used to generate discussion and professional development among the staff prior to engaging them in significant and well managed curriculum development.

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

Peter Toft  
Her Majesty's Inspector