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17 March 2010

Mrs Ann Lombardi
The Giffard Catholic Primary School
Hordern Close
Hordern Road
Wolverhampton
WV6 0HR

Dear Mrs Lombardi

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 Tuesday 16 March 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to those governors who were able to meet me at short notice and to the local authority's School Improvement Partner and consultant headteachers who also made themselves available. I would also like to thank the pupils and teachers observed during lessons.

Since the school's last inspection two newly qualified teachers have been appointed to replace staff that have left. Two additional experienced governors have been seconded by the local authority and the diocesan commission to support and advise the Governing Body. The local authority has also provided additional support by allocating consultant headteachers to work with staff as part of its 'improving teaching programme'. This provides opportunities for teachers to undertake training and observe good and excellent teaching in two excellent partner schools.

As a result of the inspection in June 2009, the school was asked to:

- establish a more rigorous programme of audit and review to improve the accuracy of self-evaluation
- improve the quality of teaching and learning by increasing the proportion of good and better teaching
- improve the quality of leadership and governance, so that the school is better placed to identify areas of weakness and to take effective action.

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.

The school is tracking pupils' attainment and rate of progress regularly and, as a result, there is consistency and accuracy in teachers' assessments. A more rigorous analysis of pupils' performance is undertaken by teachers to help them plan lessons. Attainment is rising and pupils are on course to reach higher standards compared with previous years.

Despite improvements to the quality of teaching, there remains variability in the pace of learning in lessons because teachers do not always expect enough from the pupils. The support provided by the local authority has helped to re-focus teachers' planning so that tasks set in lessons better meet the learning needs of pupils of all backgrounds and abilities. For example, the increasing proportion of pupils who join the school and who speak Polish as their main language are being supported well and assessments show accelerated progress in most cases. In some lessons however, the tasks set for more capable pupils, or those who are on the fringes of reaching expected levels for their ages, are not always sufficiently challenging.

The improved monitoring, training and support provided by consultant headteachers are helping the school move towards an increase in the proportion of good and effective teaching. Although satisfactory, some lessons miss opportunities to extend pupils' learning. Teachers' questioning varies so that class discussions are sometimes superficial or they miss opportunities to provide time for pupils to think critically or reflect and assess their own learning. There has been satisfactory progress in establishing greater consistency in teachers' marking. This is reflected where teaching is most effective as pupils are given time to edit and improve their writing in English lessons or explain their methods and working out in mathematics.

The use of consultants helps the staff to recognise features of good and outstanding teaching. Training is programmed so that all teachers have opportunities to observe best practice and to develop more effective teaching methods. Systematic monitoring is now in place so that lesson visits, work scrutiny and joint moderation exercises, where teachers agree attainment levels and look through assessments and pupils' work, are becoming routine practice.

Governors are playing an increasingly effective role in evaluating the work of the school, as well as the progress and performance of staff and pupils. However, there are still too many different forms of assessment and data banks for teachers, subject leaders and governors to monitor, which diminishes the impact of school self-evaluation. Consequently, although increasing, the school's capacity to sustain improvement remains fragile.

The School Improvement Partner's monitoring has been realistic, challenging and robust. This has sharpened the focus and placed at the forefront of the school's priorities its determination to improve achievement and establish better teaching. A broader range of monitoring now involves governors, with the evaluation committee particularly effective in bridging the gap between the reviews and analysis undertaken by the school's leadership those of the local authority.

Consequently, there is a greater sense of urgency as expressed in well-devised action plans that fall in line with the expectations set out in the local authority's statement of action. Governors are in a stronger position to evaluate the work of the school accurately and are increasingly influencing the direction that it takes; qualities that were not as evident at the time of the last inspection.

The local authority has provided good support since the school was given a Notice to Improve. The first statement of action has been revised following an evaluation by Ofsted. It now includes the recommended statement setting out the local authority's obligation to keep parents and carers informed of the school's progress. The headteacher consultants and School Improvement Partner have provided good oversight, training and guidance on each of the points for improvement highlighted in the school's last inspection.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charalambos Loizou". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Charalambos Loizou
Additional Inspector