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Mr Mike Crawford
St Joseph's RC Primary School
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Dear Mr Crawford

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 25 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 5 and 6 October 2009, the school was asked to

- Raise the standards of writing, by:
 - evaluating the impact of current strategies for teaching and learning and taking effective action to improve them
 - ensuring that work is challenging and well matched to pupils' needs
 - providing regular and challenging opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in other subjects.
- Improve the quality of pupils' learning to at least satisfactory by ensuring that:
 - more focused feedback is given to teachers on how to improve pupils' learning and appropriate action is taken by teachers as a result of this
 - pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work and act upon this advice.
- Ensure that the evidence from the school's systems for checking pupils' progress is used effectively to enable any underachievement to be addressed without delay.
- Raise attendance levels to satisfactory or better, by:
 - implementing effective strategies to encourage good attendance
 - taking decisive action to reduce the number of unauthorised absences.

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.



Analysis of the school's assessment data shows that standards of writing attained by pupils in Year 6 have improved since the last inspection. In most classes, pupils are now making better progress and the gap between the achievement of boys and girls has been narrowed, except in one class where there has been long-term staff absence. In the lessons seen, pupils were learning well and making good progress as a result of precise and effective teaching. The new coordinator for English has worked well with senior staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and organisation of writing throughout the school. Pertinent areas for improvement have been identified and worked on, including: assessment to identify individual attainment; precision in the use of targets to sharpen learning; the setting of work which matches the needs of pupils with different abilities; stimulating both boys and girls to think about their writing; the use of display to reinforce pupils' learning; and the provision of opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in depth. These initiatives have led to success within the subject of English but more remains to be done to improve pupils' use of writing in other subjects. Standards overall remain below national expectations for writing and below the standards which pupils reach in the school in mathematics and science. More time is needed for the improved practices in teaching to be developed further and to have their full impact on attainment.

Learning has improved steadily since the last inspection as a result of developments in the quality of teaching and assessment. Lessons are evaluated by the school's leaders and staff are advised on how to improve them. The records of this evaluation are in accord with the findings of this inspection and of the monitoring conducted by the local authority; teaching is now improved and unsatisfactory practice has been eradicated.

Marking is regular and pupils are often given written advice on how to improve, though more could be done to ensure that they all understand and act upon this advice. Staff have been helped to improve subject teaching by training provided in house and externally. This has been most notable in: the increased use of modern methods of assessing attainment, tracking progress and using the information gained to plan lessons which cater for the differing needs of pupils; giving pupils clear and regular feedback on their work and how to make it better; and nipping in the bud any underachievement of individual pupils. The school knows that more needs to be done to improve the consistency, as well as the quality, of learning and assessment and has appropriate plans to achieve this.

The school has worked diligently to improve pupils' attendance, with considerable success. Attendance in the spring term 2010, at 95.3%, was above last year's national average and more than two percentage points above the school's figure for 2008-09. This reflects the encouragement and incentives given to pupils for good attendance and the closer liaison with the families of pupils with poor attendance. The new procedures now need to be firmly rooted in practice to ensure that the recent improvement is maintained.



The local authority has given the school strong support within its 'Intensive Intervention' programme. This has included: the joint production of a clear and precisely focused statement of action for improvement, which has subsequently been carefully followed; specialist advice in areas such as assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress; and consultancy and training to help staff improve pupils' learning. The school has responded positively since the last inspection to this external help. Further guidance is needed to help the school to computerise the pupil tracking procedures so that staff can analyse the data more efficiently; training for this is to be completed this term.

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