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Mrs J Jackson  
The Executive Headteacher  
Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School  
Pratt Street  
Camden  
London  
NW1 0DP

Dear Mrs Jackson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Helen Griffiths, additional inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 April 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Archdiocese of Westminster, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Camden.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Our Lady Roman Catholic Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 April 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, staff, governors, and a senior officer from the local authority. Discussions were held with individual pupils during lessons.

## Context

Since the previous inspection, the local authority has brokered a collaboration between Our Lady's School and another local Roman Catholic primary school. The headteacher of that school is now the executive headteacher of both schools. The former headteacher of Our Lady's School remains on the staff as head of school. Four teaching staff have left the school since the previous inspection. At the time of this inspection, one class teacher had been in post for two days, another for three weeks. Membership of the governing body has changed. In particular, the previous chair of governors has left the governing body, and a new chair is in place.

## Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils generally listen carefully to their teachers and to each other and apply themselves in a sound manner to the tasks they are set. Across the school, pupils, especially those in Year 6, are developing a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers' expectations are higher in most classes and pupils have a greater awareness of the success criteria within lessons. Pupils generally enjoy learning more because lessons are more interesting and better tailored to their needs.

Since the previous inspection, validated test results for Year 6 pupils who left the school in July 2009 have been published. These test results show that this group of pupils attained only very low standards by the time they left.

Just over eight out of ten parents and carers surveyed by the school in April 2010 believe that their child is making good progress. Certainly, pupils' progress has begun to lift across the school, although it remains slow in Year 1. Attainment across the school remains low, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. Current Year 6 pupils are attaining at higher levels and pupils are just on course to meet the challenging targets set for them. The school's data show that there is no discernable difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils. However, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have not made the progress at the rate they should as, although improvements are now being made, provision for these pupils remains inadequate.

### Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school feels a safe and secure place to be. A significant minority of parents expressed concern about behaviour in the April 2010 school questionnaire. These parents may be reassured. The new behaviour policy is working well and, combined with the good role modelling provided by staff, its very consistent application of the new 'Golden Rules' which are displayed in every classroom is changing behaviour patterns in this school for the better. Pupils understand these rules, and the associated rewards and sanctions. As a result, although some classes have some very challenging pupils, behaviour is satisfactory, and often good.

### The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teachers now in post are demonstrating the technical skills necessary to move this school and its pupils forward at a more rapid pace. Lesson planning is stronger, showing clearly in the majority of cases what children are expected to learn and aiming to pitch tasks at more appropriate levels for higher, middle and lower ability pupils. Planning rarely shows what demands will be made of, and where appropriate, what support will be given to, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, their progress is less assured. Individual education plans for these pupils have only just recently been put into place and are not yet used by teachers and teaching assistants as key drivers to move these pupils forward.

In comparison with the position at the last inspection, however, lessons are more challenging, especially for higher ability pupils, and more varied, with a wider range of activities. Nevertheless, teachers have yet to develop high quality questioning skills to maintain levels of challenge and interest. This is particularly the case during whole-class teaching sessions when, at times, teachers place too much reliance on pupils putting their hands up to volunteer answers. The result of this is that some pupils are able to escape the teacher's focus and disengage mentally from the subject material. When pupils are working individually or in groups, a minority of teachers take opportunities to draw them briefly together and probe and build effectively upon their understanding, but this is not a consistent feature of lessons. In most classes, teachers provide pupils with individual whiteboards to help them focus at key points during the teachers' input. Use of other techniques to maintain pupils' engagement and thinking, such as talk partners, are not as widespread. Where they were used, teachers sometimes missed the fact that two or three pupils had no obvious partner and so sat in silence.

Marking is improving across the school and is starting to give a clearer indication to pupils as to what they must do to improve their work. Pupils are aware that they now have curriculum targets in English and mathematics. These are a comparatively

recent innovation so the use of them to begin to ratchet up attainment is not yet embedded.

Across the school, the introduction of a new curriculum map is now ensuring that teachers plan to cover the breadth of the National Curriculum. Schemes of work for all subjects are now in place and the executive headteacher has ensured that new resources have been provided for all curriculum areas. However, these are very new developments and have yet to show an impact on pupils' learning. A new range of extended school activities is now in place. Take-up of extra-curricular activities is good. The number and range of visits and visitors to enliven the curriculum have increased.

Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) remains unsatisfactory. The number of computers has only very recently increased and pupils do not yet have enough opportunities to develop their ICT skills.

The teaching of early reading and writing, including systematic phonics is not sufficiently focused. There are too few opportunities for all children to blend, segment, encode and practise their letter formation. The assessment of individual pupils' phonic skills across the school is insufficiently diagnostic.

During the inspection, inspectors noted some weaknesses in provision across the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Nursery, planning, although ambitious, is unwieldy. Planning in Reception, which covers whole-group, teacher-directed and child-initiated activities across the six areas of learning, provides a better model. Profile books for Nursery and Reception children are not sufficiently informative or regularly updated. In addition, there is no mechanism to ensure a balance of assessments across all six areas of learning. The outdoor areas for both settings do not sufficiently reflect the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics – satisfactory
- make better use of assessment information – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher is displaying outstanding leadership. She has galvanised the school since her arrival in January 2010 through a judiciously balanced recipe of very well articulated ambition for school improvement, direction and encouragement. She has, in a relatively short period, established a teaching staff who, at the time of this monitoring inspection, were beginning to show the potential to make transform Our Lady's into a successful school.

Senior leaders are now beginning to evaluate the work of the school. A self-review and self-evaluation policy has been introduced; this underpins regular monitoring of teaching, and pupils' learning and progress. Teachers now receive clear and pertinent feedback to help them improve their practice. In addition, the executive headteacher has introduced a 'fail-safe' mechanism in the form of a professional meeting with each teacher. At this meeting the most recent lesson observation is discussed, and the attainment and progress of the class and a selection of pupils' English and mathematics work are considered. This meeting enables the executive headteacher to determine that the feedback and evaluation made by other senior leaders are of sufficiently good quality to be reliable and to secure improvement.

Following the arrival of the executive headteacher in January, the attainment of each pupil in reading, writing and mathematics was levelled and recorded on a computer program. This is now being used purposefully to check the progress made by individual pupils, cohorts and different groups. The executive headteacher has provided useful training to the staff and governors on the use of data to support children's progress.

The present school improvement plan focuses on too many areas beyond those identified as cause for concern during the last inspection. In places, success criteria are sometimes couched in terms which make it difficult to tell when or if success will be achieved. The plan does not indicate precisely the individual(s) intended to monitor the implementation of planned actions, as distinct from the person(s) responsible for evaluating the impact of those actions. The plan is not costed. The school has a budget deficit at present so this is a clear omission.

The development of middle leaders is still at an early stage. Although they have workplans which are linked to the school improvement plan, and which determine their work for the term, they are not yet demonstrating the initiative, responsibility and accountability commensurate with this role.

The governing body now has a clear meetings structure. The chair of governors is rightly rigorous in ensuring that governors attend and play their part in the school improvement process. With the coaching of the executive headteacher, the governing body is starting to develop the ability to hold the school to account.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure leaders at all levels evaluate the work of the school accurately, pursue improvement relentlessly and develop a secure oversight of their subject areas – good.

## External support

The impact of the actions contained within the local authority statement of support has been satisfactory. The local authority has set up a project group which meets fortnightly to monitor the progress made by the school, and to gauge the level of support that the school requires. The authority has held two reviews of the school since it was placed in special measures. These have produced useful validation for work undertaken by the school since being placed in special measures. The local authority statement of action has been amended since submission, largely as required. However, in places, success criteria within the statement are insufficiently measurable, and monitoring and evaluation functions are not always distinct.