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13 October 2010

Mrs Jill Collins
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
Cross Lanes
Richmond
North Yorkshire
DL10 7DZ

Dear Mrs Collins

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 October 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please thank the Chair of the Governing Body, the senior leadership team and the School Improvement Partner for meeting with me and pass on my thanks to the pupils that gave up part of their lunchtime to talk with me.

The substantive headteacher took up her post in April 2010. One teacher is still absent due to long-term illness and one teacher started maternity leave in April 2010. The School Improvement Partner became the support adviser just after the last inspection and a new School Improvement Partner was appointed at that time.

As a result of the inspection on 8 and 9 February 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils' achievement is improving throughout the school. The provisional data for the 2010 Key Stage 2 national test results, indicate that pupils' overall attainment and progress has improved from the levels in 2009. In English and science, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 and the higher Level 5 improved. For example, results at the expected Level 4 in English improved from 80% to 87% and those for Level 5 improved from 28% to 40%. The results for mathematics were similar to those in 2009. Pupils' overall progress improved

significantly. The analysis of the school's data supports these improvements and indicates that rates of progress for these pupils accelerated over the year, enabling them to make up previous gaps in their learning. This is as a result of more rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress and focused support. At the time of the last inspection, the full impact of these actions was not clearly measurable.

The appointment of the substantive headteacher has brought stability at the leadership level. She is providing the much-needed direction for improvement and communicates an ambitious vision for the school's future. A new senior leadership team has been created and roles and responsibilities have been closely defined. This is providing greater clarity and accountability within the school. Teamwork is evident and staff show a firm commitment to working together to share ideas and improve their own skills. School morale has improved significantly and there is now a shared sense of purpose among governors, staff, pupils, parents and carers. New aims and values have been established and captured in the tag line, 'Learning with fun, friends, family and faith'. Pupils speak warmly about the headteacher and report that the school is now a much happier, more enjoyable place to be. Improvements have been made to the premises and learning environment, which have made the school a warm, welcoming place. Members of the governing body continue to be very proactive in monitoring and evaluating the school's work. The information they receive is now more regular, evaluative and reliable. This means that they are better equipped to challenge the leaders and hold them and teachers to account for the progress pupils make. The school has strengthened its capacity for sustained improvement.

The school has introduced more rigorous, regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation processes, with all leaders more involved in driving school improvement. There is a much clearer vision for improvement as leaders are gaining confidence in monitoring pupils' progress. School improvement planning is more focused on outcomes of increasingly accurate and robust self-evaluation. Closer and sharper tracking of pupils' progress is leading to quicker identification of individuals or groups of pupils, who are not progressing as well as they should. Senior managers' confidence in leading improvements has increased and they have a better understanding of data and the contribution the information makes to judging the effectiveness of teaching.

The headteacher has worked in close partnership with local authority consultants to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and develop leaders' skills. The school is aware that other senior leaders now need to take responsibility for observing teaching in the classroom themselves, so they can strengthen their contribution to improving pupils' progress. Lessons observed during the inspection confirmed that teachers are committed to improving their practice. Teachers are becoming more reflective on their own practice and when provided with feedback, some had already accurately evaluated their own strengths and weaknesses. All lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and this demonstrated that she has a clear picture of teaching and learning across the school. Assessments are increasingly reliable and accurate and teachers are making

better use of the information to plan their lessons. In the best lessons, teachers make sure learning moves on at a good pace and use questions well to extend pupils' thinking. The objectives are clear so pupils understand what they need to learn. However, activities are not always planned well enough to meet pupils' different abilities. On occasions, where pupils were working independently, progress slowed because the activities lacked clarity and pupils did not understand fully what was expected of them.

The local authority's statement of action has been evaluated and it fulfils the requirements. It has been reviewed regularly and is now more closely aligned to the school's own plans. The school is making good use of relevant external consultancy and values the support of the adviser and the School Improvement Partner. The school is gaining the confidence to be more selective about this support as improvements gather pace to ensure it becomes more autonomous. A recent review of the school by the local authority provides a robust evaluation of the school's progress so far and helpful guidance to help it improve further.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brenda McIntosh
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Embed ambition and raise expectations to drive improvement by:
 - establishing a clear vision and a sense of direction for the school
 - using accurate data to set ambitious targets for all pupils
 - using data to inform planning, monitor progress and then take quick and effective action where there is underachievement.
- Develop leadership at all levels to provide the capacity for sustained improvement by:
 - having clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all leaders
 - using clear criteria to measure the impact of leadership on pupils' outcomes
 - having clear and robust lines of accountability.