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Mrs Mia Barlow
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Barlow

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 January 2011, for the time you gave to our meeting on 10 January and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 December 2009, 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Teacher assessment data for Year 6 pupils in 2010 show that attainment in English improved on the 2009 figures. The proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected Level 4 and that reaching the higher Level 5 both increased. In mathematics, however, both these figures decreased. In English, standards were above average and in mathematics they were slightly below. The school's own analysis shows that in English all pupils made the expected rate of progress during Key Stage 2 from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1 and, while the large majority made the expected progress in mathematics, the school's own target for this measure was not met.

Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2010 show small improvements in attainment in reading and writing but a decline in mathematics. Standards are a little below national averages and this is most marked in writing.



The school's own internal assessment data show encouraging signs of improving rates of progress for current pupils, especially in lower Key Stage 2.

School improvement has focused strongly on developing writing skills and improving the quality of teaching. The newly introduced themed curriculum provides more engaging opportunities for developing pupils' literacy skills in a variety of contexts. Two classroom sets of netbooks have been purchased which provide additional opportunities for skills development. Moderation of pupils' written work has been done both within the school and in conjunction with the local authority to ensure that assessment is accurate. A new system for assessing pupils' progress in writing was introduced last year for Year 6 and is now in use across the school. Writing standards are improving, but spelling and handwriting remain weak for some pupils.

The climate for learning is very good. Behaviour in lessons is at least good and pupils show good attitudes to learning. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils. They are friendly and encouraging and create a purposeful atmosphere in their classrooms. Teachers' skill in providing work that is differentiated by ability is improving. Teachers are required to show this in their planning which is checked regularly by senior leaders. Expectations are clear and pupils tackle their work diligently and conscientiously. Older pupils in particular are beginning to take more responsibility for their own learning. Nevertheless, the pace in lessons is often steady rather than rapid. On occasion in the lessons observed, too much time was spent on teacher-led activities with the whole class and not enough time was spent on independent work with pupils applying their learning and practising their skills. Teaching assistants provide good support for less-able pupils. The grouping of pupils from Year 4, 5 and 6 in mixed-age ability groups for English and mathematics has helped teachers to focus on the needs of pupils working within a fairly narrow range of levels. So far this is proving more effective in English and for more-able pupils in mathematics than for middle and lower-ability pupils in mathematics.

Targets are recorded in books and pupils know what these are. Marking often includes helpful comments, but marking in mathematics books does not always highlight incorrect answers. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully through regular assessments. The data are collated termly and used to identify underachievers and to plan interventions where necessary. An evaluation of intervention programmes shows that these are beneficial in accelerating progress for most of the pupils involved.

The school's own observation evidence shows that there have been improvements in the quality of teaching. However, internal observation records tend to focus on positive aspects of teaching and do not always give enough attention to learning. Involvement of the School Improvement Partner in joint lesson observations helps the school to ensure that judgements about the overall quality of lessons are accurate.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and clear plans to address the latter. Senior leaders have established systems to ensure that appropriate individual targets are set and that pupils' progress is monitored and tracked carefully. There is regular scrutiny of teachers' planning. Teachers have been provided with improved professional development opportunities. The introduction of peer observation and coaching is helping to ensure that good practice is shared within the school. Evidence of the development of capacity to improve can be seen in the substantial improvement in outcomes in writing at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010. Further evidence comes from the significant improvement in attendance figures which rose from below average in 2008-09 to above average in 2009-10.

Since the inspection, the governing body has received additional training and its understanding of data has developed. There are productive working relationships with the school. As the governing body becomes better informed it is more willing to ask questions that challenge when appropriate, as well as supporting the headteacher and the school.

The local authority has provided good support to the school. The advice of the School Improvement Partner has been a valuable resource. Other support has included help with moderation of assessments.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2009

- Improve the standard of writing throughout the school by:
 - identifying regular opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes, across a range of subjects
 - regularly checking samples of pupils' writing to help ensure that teachers' judgements are accurate.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is more consistently in line with the best in the school by:
 - making good use of assessment information so that teachers plan thoroughly for the learning of all groups of pupils in their classes
 - encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for and direct their own learning.