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2 March 2011

Dr C Reynolds
Headteacher
Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College
Duffield Road
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Dear Dr Reynolds

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to your students and the chair of the governing body's monitoring committee for taking the time to talk to us.

As a result of the inspection on 21 January 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

In 2010, attainment was below average but the proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics was higher than in 2009. Many students did not make the overall progress expected of them, although progress in some subjects, including English and mathematics, improved from the previous year. School leaders have carefully analysed the reasons behind students' underachievement and are implementing appropriate strategies to tackle it. These include curriculum changes such as the introduction of new science courses. The school's current assessment information and other inspection evidence show that most students are on track to make better progress this year.

Senior and middle leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the majority of lessons are now good. Support from local authority consultants, alongside a strong programme of intervention supported by a Gaining Ground partner secondary school, is having a beneficial impact on the quality of



teaching. In better lessons a wide range of strategies are used to facilitate learning, including group work and discussion, and as a result students are interested in their learning and engaged by the activities. Less successful lessons are characterised by teachers talking too much or directing questions so that only a few students are required to respond. As a result, the pace of learning slows. Teachers have good subject knowledge but do not make enough use of information on students' prior attainment to plan appropriately challenging activities for all ability levels. Students behave well and apply themselves diligently; relationships between teachers and students are excellent. The quality of marking varies considerably, but a significant amount is uninformative and it is not carried out frequently enough.

Staff from the specialist subject of performing arts have been effective in working with other departments to increase variety and engagement in lessons through more creative approaches to learning. This has been particularly successful in English, where drama specialists have worked with English staff to enact plays and poems.

The school's leaders have significantly improved the way they gather and use assessment information. The new tracking system has been effective in highlighting underachievement and increasing staff expectations for the performance of all students. Faculty and pastoral leaders are increasingly confident in using assessment data to develop focused intervention strategies for individual students. The rigorous monitoring of the academic performance of students in Year 11, and support for any who fall behind, has been a major factor in improving academic standards this year.

The recruitment of new senior leaders and the restructuring of roles and responsibilities have strengthened the capacity of the leadership team to deliver school improvement. Coherent systems for monitoring the work of the school now include frequent and thorough department reviews, which mean that senior leaders have a good understanding of departmental strengths and weaknesses. Targets for departmental improvement are sharply focused, but senior leaders' evaluation of the progress made by departments on these areas for action is not yet rigorous enough, and middle leaders do not yet hold teachers fully to account for the progress of students within their department. Local authority consultants have provided effective support to assist the school in standardising its assessment of teaching and learning. The school has introduced a new system for improvement planning which provides staff at all levels with a clear understanding of their role in the school improvement process. The governing body has set up a monitoring committee that has enabled it to participate in more rigorous monitoring of the school's performance.

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

Deborah James
Additional Inspector

September 2010

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

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

- Ensure that teaching consistently promotes good learning by:
 - increasing the effectiveness of assessment by making regular and thorough checks on the quality of learning during lessons and by providing full and helpful feedback on pupils' work
 - promoting the use of a broader and more interesting range of teaching strategies tailored to meet the needs of each pupil, particularly more able pupils
 - increasing pupils' participation in learning activities.
- Sharpen the focus of improvement plans on the main priorities for action, include challenging timescales and clear success criteria, and monitor the completion of actions rigorously.
- Increase the rigour of the lesson observation scheme by evaluating attainment and learning fully.
- Use data rigorously to monitor the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress and their outcomes.