

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs F Collins
Headteacher
The Federation of St. Mary's Priory Catholic
Infant and Junior Schools
Hermitage Road
London
N15 5RE

Dear Mrs Collins

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 and 9 February 2011 to look at the leadership of the federation. Please pass on my thanks to the governors, parents and the local authority representative that also gave up their time and made a valuable contribution to the visit.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with parents, governors, staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and visits to lessons.

The effectiveness of the federation's leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Context

The Federation of St. Mary's Priory Catholic Infant and Junior Schools consists of St. Mary's Priory RC Junior School and St Mary's Priory RC Infant School. The schools were federated in September 2006 and are situated on the same site. The federation is led by one headteacher.

Outcomes

- The achievement of pupils overall is good, but for some significant groups, such as the majority of pupils who come from homes where English is not the first language, it is outstanding.

- Assessment information shows that the large majority of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skill development, particularly social and language skills, that are well below those expected given their age. Rapid progress is then made by nearly all groups across the school so that by the time pupils leave Year 6 attainment is average overall. However, those pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those who come from homes where English is not the first language, reach standards that are consistently above those of similar groups nationally. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good and often outstanding progress across the school.
- At both recent school inspections behaviour was judged to be outstanding. Pupils' behaviour during this visit was excellent. They demonstrate great politeness, enjoyment of school life and respect for all. This is underpinned by their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- At the time of federation, attendance in the infant school was low. Targeted intervention work with specific families has resulted in a marked improvement. Attendance levels in the infant school are now average while they continue to be above average in the junior school.

Provision

- Rigorous procedures for improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum are well established and very effective. Federation records and recent inspection reports show that teaching is rarely less than good and is often outstanding. One important reason for this is because assessment information is used very well to inform lesson plans and, consequently, teachers skilfully tailor activities to meet the needs of individual pupils.
- The federation's provision for the care, guidance and support that pupils receive is outstanding. All pupils thrive in this extremely caring and stimulating community. The significant proportion of pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are cared for extremely well. The nurture unit, for example, has been so successful at helping specific pupils to manage their behaviour that other local schools have taken advantage of this resource to support pupils and train their staff. All staff demonstrate a great compassion and determination to ensure that all partner agencies work together to support these pupils effectively.

Leadership and management

- Your leadership is outstanding. You have been extremely successful in establishing a highly effective team of staff that works seamlessly across the whole federation so that it appears to be one school. You have established a strong sense of common purpose which is shared by all, with staff demonstrating a determination to improve the education and life chances of all pupils. This is underpinned by rigorous procedures to hold staff to account for their work. Those school leaders who were interviewed also appreciate the much greater opportunity provided by the federation for professional development and leadership responsibility. As a result, you have a team that has extremely high morale and great loyalty to the federation and its aims.

- Leaders at all levels are very effective at making improvements. For example, the pupil progress meetings rigorously hold teachers to account for the progress of the pupils in their care and ensure that agreed improvements to teaching are carried out effectively. Recently, this has resulted in improvements to the provision for more able pupils, the quality of science lessons and pupils' confidence to work independently. While the procedures for school improvement are extremely effective the development plan does not represent the high quality of this work as well as it could. For example, success criteria are not as sharp as they could be so that in some areas of school development it is unclear how those responsible are able to evaluate the effectiveness of improvements to provision.
- The governing body demonstrates an astute strategic understanding of the federation. It was instrumental in driving forward the decision to federate and has effectively continued to hold leaders to account for their work. An important strength of governance has been in the effective use of the additional resources available as a result of federation. For example, facilities are now available for adult training that are very beneficial to parents and the community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpening up the development plan so that it better reflects the high quality of school improvement work and makes it easier for school leaders to evaluate success.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector