

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
BRISTOL
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 0117 315 0430
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** stephen.godden@tribalgroup.com

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Mr A Holdsworth
Headteacher
Stella Maris Catholic Primary School
Parkfield Road
Folkestone
Kent
CT19 5BY

Dear Mr Holdsworth

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to the staff and to pupils who spent time talking to me.

Since the last report the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language has increased to above average, and the number from Catholic families has continued to decline gradually. From Year 6, most pupils now transfer to the new secondary Academy nearby rather than to other schools. There was unusually high mobility amongst last year's Year 6 group, and recent staffing difficulties at Key Stage 2 this year and last, which have significantly impacted on performance in Years 4 to 6.

As a result of the inspection on 3 June 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.

Senior staff demonstrate strong commitment to raising achievement at all levels and pupils' progress overall is satisfactory. From the continuing good start children get in the Early Years Foundation Stage, many recent initiatives, implemented since the last inspection, have been successful in improving teaching and creating good



achievement at Key Stage 1. Standards at Year 2 now match the national average. Improvement in mathematics in Years 1 and 2 has been marked, but the school has also raised standards and achievement in writing here. Writing has also improved at Key Stage 2, but the difficulties last year reduced the impact of some other initiatives on Year 6's overall attainment. Current Year 6 pupils have the benefit of experienced stable staffing and are making better progress from relatively low starting points. They are on track to meet their key targets in 2011. Pupils' behaviour continues to be good, but attendance remains below average, despite the school's strenuous efforts to improve it.

The school has worked hard to improve the quality of all its provision and to eradicate inadequate teaching. This process continues and consequently, good teaching seen on this inspection, combined with better tracking of pupils' progress, is leading to more consistently good achievement in most year groups. This includes a brisker pace of learning and higher levels of challenge in lessons, both of which the school was asked to improve. Senior staff recognise that teaching and learning are not always good, however. This is because effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching by the senior staff accurately identify strengths and areas for development, but subsequent very well-targeted support, such as team-teaching and coaching to improve weaker areas, has yet to be fully successful.

Curriculum improvements have been the key to raising attainment and progress. A 'thinking skills' programme designed to help pupils' independent learning is creating exciting integrated experiences which motivate and engage pupils' enthusiasm. This is being extended further, but is already creating better understanding of the links between subjects. Combined with well targeted schemes to improve reading, writing and mathematics, these curriculum developments are creating better achievement, particularly where teaching is good. The school retains its many strengths in providing sensitive care, guidance and support, creating a secure ethos of 'one big family', as pupils commented.

Improving the school's capacity for sustained improvement was a key area for development from the last report and has been achieved successfully. Subject leaders, particularly those for English and mathematics, are now fully involved in school evaluation and improvement. Working effectively together, and with useful support from its external advisors, the senior team is managing difficult issues well, resulting, for instance, in minimising adverse impact on Year 6 achievements in 2010. Partners have been particularly helpful in improving mathematics.

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

Janet Simms
Additional Inspector



Annex

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

- Raise standards in mathematics by increasing the rates of progress pupils make.
- Ensure that all lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and that pupils' tasks are appropriately challenging.
- Build the school's capacity to improve further by involving subject coordinators more fully in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their subjects.