

CfBT Inspection Services T 0300 1231231
Suite 22 enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
West Lancs Investment Centre www.ofsted.gov.uk
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

Direct T 01695 566934
Direct F 01695 729320
gtunncliffe@cfbt.com
www.cfbt-inspections.com



24 Jun 2011

Mrs R Bibby
Headteacher
St Finbar's Catholic Primary School
South Hill Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L8 9RY

Dear Mrs Bibby,

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner, the small group of parents and carers and the pupils who also met with me.

Since the inspection of November 2009 the future of the school has been secured. This has resulted in an increase in pupil numbers with 20 more pupils on roll now than at that time. There has also been much fluctuation in the proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language. Above average in November 2009, both are below average now. In addition, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals has risen sharply to nearly four times the national average.

In November 2010 the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery- and Reception-aged children) was inspected by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors as part of Ofsted's survey into early learning. The inspector judged the effectiveness of the school's Early Years Foundation Stage in meeting the children's communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional learning and development as good.

As a result of the Section 5 inspection of November 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 satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Following the inspection of November 2009 standards attained by pupils have continued to fluctuate. At the end of Key Stage 1 there is an improving trend with standards in reading, writing and mathematics rising from low to below average levels. The picture at Key Stage 2

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is mixed. For example, while in 2010 standards in mathematics rose from low to below average, English dipped further still. This year's teacher assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics, if translated into actual test results, point to a welcome improvement.

Since the last inspection, the school has challenged pupils to make two sub-levels progress during the course of a year. Nevertheless, senior leaders recognise this rate of progress is still not strong enough to drive up standards beyond their current levels. There are several reasons for this. First, because the school development plan does not specify precisely enough what leaders and the governing body wish to achieve, leaders and teachers are not yet able to consistently formulate accurate targets for pupils so that they may more successfully improve their work. Second, too many opportunities are missed for pupils to write independently or in an extended way in subjects such as history, geography and science. This is because there is sometimes an over reliance on worksheets which do not engage fully pupils in their learning or not enough of a subject taught. This missing of opportunities is a key factor why the more-able pupils are still not attaining the higher Levels 3 and 5. Third, while there was good quality monitoring of lessons which focused on pupils' learning well in 2009/10, this has not been sustained sufficiently this year. This, coupled with scrutinies of pupils' work which have not been as sharply focused on learning, has led to the inconsistencies and weaknesses identified in this inspection not being picked up and acted on earlier. These factors show why the school's progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory rather than good.

There have been, nonetheless, a number of noticeable and welcome successes. The focus on a more practical approach to teaching and learning in mathematics is paying dividends in terms of pupils' attainment across the school. Information and communication technology is now a feature of teaching and learning across the curriculum and used to particularly good effect, for example, in enabling Year 4 pupils to understand not only the idea of sustainability but also the implications of it in terms of the resources people use on a daily basis. In addition, the piloting of an after-school club to work with a small group of pupils on their literacy skills also engaged their parents and carers well. Very importantly, and ensuring children continue to make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the strengths in this key stage identified in the November 2009 inspection and the November 2010 survey continue to be maintained and enhanced. The good teaching that was observed during the November 2009 inspection was also evident during this inspection. There is a greater awareness of the more-able pupils in that they are better identified now, although it is still the case that they are not always challenged in lessons. Nevertheless, in the majority of lessons observed during this inspection the progress pupils made was better than expected. This was because, in the main, adults asked good quality questions and made use of activities that met learning objectives well. In the two joint lesson observations carried out by the headteacher and inspector, judgements of the quality of teaching and learning were in agreement.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. I wish you all well for the future.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place 5 Nov 2009

- Improve standards for the more-able pupils in English and mathematics by:
 - raising expectations for the levels they can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers set learning objectives in lessons that are based on pupils' prior attainment and linked to National Curriculum levels
 - strengthening the monitoring that senior managers do to check on the progress made by the more-able pupils
 - considering whether it is possible to provide some targeted support for the more-able pupils for these groups.

- Improve standards generally by:
 - providing guidance on how pupils can improve their work
 - accelerating the progress boys make in mathematics in Years 3 to 5
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to develop skills in other subjects.