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7 July 2011

Mrs A Mackay
Headteacher
English Martyrs' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Redcar Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 5AU

Dear Mrs Mackay,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of English Martyrs' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 July 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 the staff, Vice Chair of the Governing Body and the pupils who gave up their time to talk to me during the day.

There have been very few changes in the school's context since the last inspection. The turbulence in staffing suffered in previous years has been eliminated. The school has a settled team with the exception of a temporary Early Years Foundation Stage leader who is standing in for a member of staff on maternity leave.

As a result of the inspection on 24 February 2010, the school was asked to tackle 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The attainment of Year 6 pupils in national tests in 2010 was well-below average, representing inadequate progress, even when taking their below-average level of skills and abilities on entry into school. This was partly because the good strategies developed by leaders by the time of the inspection had not had time to tackle the history of underachievement for that group of pupils and because the turbulence in staffing had particularly affected them. Pupils' achievements in other year groups were better. Strong team working and leaders' resolute focus on improving teaching, the use of assessment and the curriculum are successfully contributing to pupils' improving attainment and faster progress and to leaders' better capacity for sustained improvement.

Provisional test results for current Year 6 pupils indicate that these pupils' attainment has improved significantly. The gap between the school's results and the national average has been virtually eliminated with a considerable increase in the proportion of pupils achieving

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Level 4 or above in English and mathematics combined. Detailed analysis of pupils' achievements identified that boys did less well than girls last year. This discrepancy is being tackled well and boys' and girls' achievements are now similar.

Lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' workbooks, discussions with pupils and the school's detailed tracking information on pupils' achievements show that virtually all pupils are making better progress in their lessons. Pupils' work books successfully map the good and sometimes rapid progress they are making over time but also show the pride they have in their work. The quality of teaching is improving well. Excellent relationships between pupils and teachers make a strong contribution to pupils' very positive attitudes to learning, behaviour and their achievements in lessons. Teachers generally use the regular assessment information they have about pupils' current levels of understanding successfully, to plan lessons that are matched to their individual starting points so all can be suitably challenged to move on quickly in their learning. Careful assessment of the needs of pupils who have a special educational need and/or disability and targeted work and support in lessons is ensuring these pupils can achieve as well as their peers from their individual starting points.

Teachers' consistent application of the school's marking policy means books are marked well with comments that help pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do next to move on in their learning. Pupils talk authoritatively about their 'target cards', how they are involved in setting their targets and how these are regularly reviewed with teachers and shared with their parents or carers to make sure they too know how well their children are doing. Pupils are becoming increasingly adept at identifying their next steps in learning for themselves and talk about how much they enjoy the increasing opportunities they have to evaluate their own work and that of their peers.

Leaders have transformed the curriculum by involving pupils, to develop exciting termly themes that interest and engage them; especially boys and lower-ability pupils. This has had a significant impact on their enthusiasm and willingness to take full part in lessons and is a major contributory factor to the rapid improvements in writing and reading at both Key Stages. Changes to the curriculum are helping pupils to gain a greater understanding of the diversity of communities across Britain. In partnership with their federated school, a school in a more diverse area and the wider cluster of local primary schools, pupils are also able to work, partake in sporting activities and play with pupils from across the city and whose backgrounds may be very different from theirs.

The headteacher and the team are successfully developing a wider range of strategies in order to inform parents better about what their child needs to do to improve their work, including termly progress meetings with parents and carers which are well-attended. They have also introduced termly 'curriculum celebration days' where parents, carers or grandparents are invited into school to see their children's work but especially to join in with their children's learning experiences and taking part in the range of exciting practical activities on offer. Parents and carers have fed back to teachers on how these experiences are helping them to have a greater involvement in the life of the school and in their understanding of their children's learning, progress and achievements.

At the time of the last inspection, high-quality challenge and support from local authority officers was valued and contributed productively to the developing improvements in teaching and in teachers' use of assessment. As the school has become more self-determining and successful over the past year, their role has rightly reduced to the usual level for schools across the city. Close partnership working with their federated school has been pivotal in disseminating good practice, supporting the transformation of the curriculum and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Such actions have had a discernible impact in all aspects of the school's work and are evident, for example, in the much better progress pupils are making across the school.

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

Mrs Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 24 February 2010

- Improve pupils' attainment by:
 - implementing the best practice in teachers' marking in all classes
 - ensuring that all pupils know what they need to do next to improve their work
 - informing parents and carers what their child needs to do to improve their work
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to evaluate their learning.

- Improve the curriculum by ensuring children become more involved in planning their learning and have a better understanding of British society.