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14 July 2011

Mr J Murray
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Cheetham Hill Road
Dukinfield
Cheshire
SK16 5LB

Dear Mr Murray,

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 July 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Discussions with senior leaders and managers, members of the governing body, the pupils, the previous School Improvement Partner and the headteacher from the partner school were also very helpful. Please pass on my thanks to all concerned for the time they gave to talk to me and for the welcome I received.

Apart from the Year 2 class being taught by a temporary teacher, there have been few changes to the context of the school since the February 2010 inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 2 February 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 good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' enjoyment of school and their positive attitudes to learning make a significant contribution to their progress. Pupils' achievement has improved steadily since the previous inspection. The most recent test information shows more pupils reached the expected level in mathematics and science than in previous years. In addition, the percentage of Year 6 pupils attaining the higher levels in both English and mathematics increased and is broadly in line with national average. Boys are beginning to make more-consistent progress across the school, but they still perform less well than girls. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers because of well-targeted intervention programmes. Although overall attainment remains below the national figure, a greater proportion of pupils are making at least satisfactory progress from their starting points. This represents the least these pupils are capable of achieving.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The school's own tracking information confirms pupils are making better progress and attainment levels are rising, although too many inconsistencies remain between classes and subjects. More pupils, particularly those in Years 3 and 4, need to make better than expected progress in order to tackle previous underachievement. It is for this reason that the school's progress in making improvements since the previous inspection is satisfactory rather than good.

Teaching is improving because weaknesses are being eradicated and more teaching is consistently good. Teachers use day-to-day assessment information to plan lively activities which spark pupils' interests and meet the academic needs of most groups. Positive relationships result in warm and welcoming classrooms. In the best lessons, teaching is precise and questions are used very effectively to build on prior learning and challenge pupils' thinking. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and there are many opportunities for pupils to work independently. Teaching is less effective when the purpose of the lesson is unclear or when pupils have to sit and listen for an inappropriate amount of time. The teaching of writing is strong because skills are systematically taught and pupils have ample opportunity to write for sustained periods of time. Due to a whole-school strategy for developing calculation skills, the teaching of mathematics is improving. However, an over-reliance on published worksheets in some classes hinders the amount of progress pupils make. Pupils acknowledge teaching has improved. They say learning is more fun and that they have to work hard in lessons.

Pupils talk with confidence about the improved system for target setting and how it helps them to understand what they need to do next. Teachers' feedback on pupils writing carefully identifies success and provides precise advice for further improvement. This is less well developed in mathematics and science books.

Leaders and managers acknowledge a slow start in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, from January 2011, the pace of change has been rapid and much has been accomplished since this point. Determined leadership and decisive action by the headteacher has firmly placed pupils' academic needs at the centre of all the school's work. Re-invigorated leaders and managers have a clear understanding of their collective and individual roles. This has led to a shared drive and common sense of purpose. Leaders and managers make a significant contribution to driving improvement by their involvement in monitoring activities and the support and guidance they provide to their colleagues. Considerable improvements to the systems for monitoring the work of the school have led to improvements in teaching. The improved systems to check pupils' progress have led to greater whole-school accountability and sharper identification of priorities for improvement. Members of the governing body have increased their monitoring role by taking responsibility for key aspects of school life and regularly meeting with relevant leaders and managers to question the progress being made. Improvements to the school's attendance policy have led to fewer pupils being absent. However, the number of pupils who do not attend school because of family holidays during term time remains the main cause of the school's overall attendance being no better than average.

Overall, the evidence from the inspection clearly indicates that the school is in a much stronger position than at the previous inspection. Actions to strengthen leadership roles across the whole school are leading to better teaching and stronger pupil achievement. As a consequence, the school has made good progress in demonstrating a better capacity to improve.

The external support provided to the school has been effective and well targeted. The support from local authority consultants has led to a consistent approach to teaching calculations. The school has also benefitted greatly from the partnership arrangements with another primary school. The partner headteacher has provided strong support to help teachers improve their practice and to aid leaders and managers to implement whole-school systems.

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

Miss Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 2 February 2010

- Over the next term improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make, so that they are consistently good, by:
 - ensuring teachers use day-to-day assessments to provide activities that are challenging and are carefully matched to the varied needs of all pupils
 - asking probing questions in lessons which give pupils opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully, especially for more-able pupils
 - setting and reviewing targets more systematically with pupils so they clearly understand how to improve.

- By the end of the academic year raise standards in mathematics and science, particularly for boys, by:
 - improving ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly by setting quantifiable measures against which to evaluate success
 - distributing the leadership of the school even more widely by extending the capacity of middle leaders and members of the governing body to manage their areas of responsibility through coaching and training
 - working more closely with families to improve attendance to ensure they appreciate the impact of poor attendance on their children's learning and progress.