

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 1LH

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Serco
Direct T 0121 683 3888



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Ms F Topa
Headteacher
St Gregory's Catholic Middle School
Biddenham Turn
Bedford
MK40 4AT

Dear Ms Topa

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of St Gregory's Catholic Middle School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school without notice on 13 December 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, the members of the governing body, the Executive Principal of the Federation of Bedford Catholic Schools, and the local authority representative, for answering my questions so patiently. Please thank especially the assistant headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body, who made last-minute changes to their plans in order to talk to me, and the pupils who served me Christmas lunch.

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes at senior leadership level. An interim headteacher was appointed in January 2011 and this position was made permanent in September 2011. Senior leaders who have left the school have mostly been replaced through internal promotion. Eight members of staff left in July 2011 and eight new appointments were made for September. Specialist teaching in art, science and mathematics is provided by three teachers who have joint positions across the Federation of Bedford Catholic Schools. The school is currently engaged with the local authority in a pilot Transfer and Transition project.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was expected to close in 2014 and convert to a primary school as part of the reorganisation of middle schools in Bedford. However, following the cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future scheme, the school will now remain open as a middle school.

As a result of the inspection on 19 and 20 May 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 good progress in making improvements, and good progress in



demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is good.

Pupils' learning and progress were good in five of the seven lessons seen during this inspection. In the best cases, pupils showed independent learning skills and the ability to work in teams. For example, one class investigated the relationship between the size of a group and the number of Christmas cards they would exchange. In another class, groups of pupils devised short poetry performances for a forthcoming history visit. The inspection findings were consistent with the school's own assessments, which show that attainment has increased for pupils in every year group compared to the corresponding groups in previous years. In the four terms since the previous inspection, pupils' rate of progress has improved in reading, writing and mathematics, and now exceeds national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are now achieving just as well as other pupils.

During the inspection, pupils behaved well in lessons and as they moved around the school. Playground safety has been improved by resurfacing work and by tighter supervision at break times and before and after school. The new behaviour management system provides a clear discipline structure for pupils and has a greater emphasis on rewarding good behaviour. Pupils who have been in trouble feel that they were dealt with calmly and helped to understand the consequences of their actions. As a result, the number of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions has been reduced considerably. Most parents and carers, and a large majority of pupils, agree that behaviour in the school is good. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection. Most pupils enjoy school and feel safe. Relationships among pupils from the many different ethnic groups are mostly very good, with many friendship groups being ethnically diverse. Racist comments are rare, but a small number of pupils who have been subject to them report some inconsistency in how they are handled.

The quality of teaching is now good in a large majority of lessons. Clear learning objectives, effective modelling and explanation by teachers, and carefully selected pupil activities help pupils to learn new skills and improve existing ones. In the best lessons, pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and the most able are given more challenging tasks. However, some inconsistency remains in the extent to which teachers plan a range of activities to cater for pupils working at different levels. The quality of marking seen in pupils' books was good in English and satisfactory in mathematics and science.

Pupils' attainment is assessed frequently and the results are recorded centrally. Groups of staff meet regularly to discuss each pupil's progress. This means that any underachievement by individuals or groups is quickly identified and support is provided promptly to help them catch up.

The main reason for the improvements in teaching, learning and pupils' behaviour has been the relentless focus on school improvement that the headteacher and the Executive Principal have maintained. School leaders now have clear structures for performance management and the line management of subject leaders. The systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation includes regular lesson observations and frequent drop-in checks on lessons by senior staff. The school improvement plan identifies pertinent actions to improve different aspects of the school and their impact is measured by rigorous analysis of performance and questionnaire data. The headteacher has established a series of 'focus weeks' where different aspects of the school's work are scrutinised in detail and linked to relevant professional development. As a result, all members of staff now share the headteacher's vision for improving the school further.

The school continues to meet government safeguarding requirements. Record keeping has been improved by introducing a section in the single central record of vetting checks to record employees' right to work in the United Kingdom. School leaders maintain effective records of bullying, but the electronic summary does not include enough detail to provide an overview of emerging patterns.

School leaders are engaging well with the local authority to strengthen the school's effectiveness. For example, the Transition and Transfer project is helping to improve academic continuity when pupils transfer from lower schools and when they progress to the upper school. The Federation of Bedford Catholic Schools has played a critical role in transforming the school's outlook. The joint governing body has established a support committee which meets regularly to hold school leaders to account, for example by questioning senior and middle leaders about their latest reports. In addition, the sharing of expertise across the federation is enriching the quality of leadership.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010

- Improve pupils' achievement and the standards that they reach by:
 - improving the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good
 - ensuring that the work teachers set matches the needs and abilities of all pupils in the class.

- Improve safeguarding procedures so that all pupils feel safe by:
 - supervising the playground more closely to ensure good behaviour
 - improving record keeping.

- Hold staff accountable by monitoring the implementation of initiatives and measuring their impact more rigorously.