

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancashire Investment
Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566862
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: rcowley@cfbt.com



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Mrs J Lewin
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Wingate
County Durham
TS28 5AN

Dear Mrs Lewin

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 January 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please thank the pupils and the members of the governing body for their contributions.

Since the previous inspection a higher proportion of pupils have joined the school. As a result of the inspection on 8-9 July 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.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The previous inspection identified a recent increase in pupils' progress. The school has worked hard to sustain this and has been successful in maintaining the good progress between Years 2 and 6, although progress in Year 1 and the Reception Year has not improved as effectively. A previous weakness was that far fewer pupils reached higher levels than expected in national tests at the end of Year 6. This is no longer the case, with half of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in the 2011 national tests in both English and mathematics. Lesson observations in the monitoring inspection confirmed that more-able pupils continue to rise to the additional challenges they are set. In Years 2 and 3, these pupils explained their mathematical thinking in great detail and more-able pupils in the older class had a very clear understanding of issues, such as rhetorical questions and the power of text in advertisements. Attainment has also risen at the end of Key Stage 1 and is now broadly average. Curricular improvements to guided reading sessions have had a positive impact. In Key Stage 2, pupils now sensitively discuss issues related to



texts and tackle new reading with enthusiasm. The upward trend in attendance rates has continued and has been particularly good for those who are persistent absentees; this has had a positive impact on these pupils' progress.

The quality of teaching

There has been good improvement in the use of accurate assessment to set challenging targets and raise expectations. There are now some outstanding features in teaching. These include a very fast pace and the use of different levels of questions that match different pupils' needs very closely and ensure that every pupils' learning is taken forward. There are now clear targets set for pupils, which are linked to marking of individual work. Pupils appreciate this system and have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. In the two oldest classes, teachers have developed efficient skills to detect pupils' misunderstandings in lessons and modify their future planning in the light of this analysis. There has been a good range of professional development organised for all staff, which they appreciate. The partnership with the federated school works well in offering opportunities for teachers to extend their skills with a wider range of professionals in a similar context. Planning for children's independent learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved, particularly in the indoor learning where there is a better range of carefully organised activities for children. However, the information gained from observing children is still not recorded systematically enough or used consistently to target individuals' learning needs across the full Reception Year provision. This is weakest in the use of teachers' questioning, particularly for more-able children, and in the range of activities in outdoor learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have sustained their good levels of behaviour, their very positive attitudes towards their learning and their sustained concentration. There is now a wider range of opportunities for pupils to extend their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development further, which pupils appreciate. The school has introduced a Rights Respecting Schools Award, which pupils thoroughly enjoy. They particularly relish working with pupils from all the other age groups in family groups and show great respect for each others' views and experiences. They are developing a very good understanding of communities in other countries and are very keen to extend their virtual village, which records the outcomes of their fund-raising, such as buying drought-resistant crops or providing a bicycle for a health worker. There are now more opportunities for pupils to play musical instruments, with whole classes playing the recorder or a brass instrument.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are working very effectively together to maintain a strong focus on continuing improvement. School improvement planning processes and documentation are very closely focused on the previous inspection

issues. An efficient new tracking system has been introduced, evaluated and modified. It is used effectively to monitor provision through the school. Assessment systems have gone through the same process and are now much better suited to their purpose. Both these strategies have increased the school's ability to track individual pupil's progress, identify appropriate interventions to increase progress and have had a positive impact in raising attainment. Monitoring skills are developing well and resulting in well-focused professional development programmes for staff. The governing body are developing its skills of questioning leaders more closely about developments and are in a good position to analyse data in more detail and relate them to the school's provision.

The support provided by the local authority has been good in helping the school to analyse data more effectively and in developing skills of monitoring. It has not been as effective in improving the full range of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Margaret Shepherd
Additional inspector

Annex

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

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that standards rise, particularly in Key Stage 1, ensuring that:
 - accurate assessment information is used to set challenging targets and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve by the end of Year 2
 - progress in lessons is regularly reviewed to detect misunderstandings or provide additional challenge.
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure that all children make good progress in all areas of learning by:-
 - using the information gained from observing and assessing children's learning to plan activities that meet their differing needs
 - ensuring that all activities have a clear learning focus and that these are communicated effectively to children.