

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Owens
The Acting Headteacher
St John's Catholic Comprehensive School
Rochester Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA12 2JW

Dear Mr Owens

SCHOOLS WHERE THE PUPILS' BEHAVIOUR HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A CONCERN BY INSPECTION: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JOHN'S CATHOLIC COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Clare Gillies, Peter Dacombe and Madeleine Gerard, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 4 and 5 October 2006 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a return monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority and the chair of governors.

Context

The substantive headteacher has been suspended and the school is being led by an acting headteacher supported by an associate headteacher. An additional deputy headteacher has been seconded to the school to strengthen the senior leadership team further. There have been significant staff changes

since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2006. The school has prepared an application for specialist status with the intent of specialising in visual arts, music and English.

Achievement and standards

Standards continue to be above average and pupils make satisfactory progress. GCSE results in 2006 were similar to those obtained the year before. The school has not recovered to the position it achieved in 2003 when results were well above average. School data show that there remains underachievement in many subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. In lessons where teachers plan suitably challenging tasks, pupils enjoy their learning, behave well, and are keen to get on with their work. However, this occurs too infrequently. Where teaching methods and the work set are ill-matched to their needs, pupils do not behave well. In these lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are too low.

Pupils told inspectors that the work the school has done to improve attitudes and behaviour is effective. The new system of green and yellow rewards and sanctions cards is being used more consistently by staff. Pupils are involved in measures to deal with bullying and speak enthusiastically about opportunities they have to contribute to the school community. For example, the newly established anti-bullying committee has received specific training and its members feel that the behaviour around the school and in lessons is better. Changes to timings of the school day have had a positive impact on the smooth running of morning registration, breaks and lunchtimes and pupils say they now feel safe. Relationships between pupils are satisfactory.

Because of problems with the data systems, the school was unable to readily provide details of pupils' attendance records. The number of exclusions is high but the school attributes this to the more rigorous application of the behaviour policy.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the previous monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- continue to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory. However, pockets of inadequate teaching still exist, especially in lower teaching sets. Some teachers demand too little of pupils, accept a leisurely pace of progress, and set work that is too easy such as colouring or word searches. Some of the lower sets are large and it becomes necessary to control behaviour when the teaching is not stimulating and interesting. It is unfortunate that some teachers feel it necessary to raise their voices to gain control rather than using other more effective methods to manage pupils' behaviour.

The best lessons are taught at a brisk pace. Teachers use effective questioning to make the pupils think and they convey a sense of enthusiasm for the subject they are teaching.

Pupils make best progress in lessons where teachers are skilful at assessing their progress during lessons and using the information to plan ahead. These teachers encourage pupils to assess their own and others' work. At the end of an outstanding technology lesson, pupils put their hands up eagerly to evaluate the work done and, in an exciting art lesson, pupils judged each other's work in pairs and learned much in the process. These good assessment methods are not used by enough teachers.

The quality of teachers' preparation and marking varies considerably. The latter is often related to the presentation of work, rather than its content and how it could be improved. Some teachers' learning objectives reveal how well the teachers have considered ways of relating the work to pupils' experiences and interests. However, some learning objectives are less focused.

The lower school building is now the main base for Years 7 and 8 and this means that there is now far less movement of pupils between sites at change of lessons. Registration in the morning is shorter, leading to an earlier start to lessons. Lunch times are now arranged so that younger and older pupils have their lunches at different times. The route for pupils between the two sites has been changed and clearly marked. Staff and pupils say that these measures have resulted in improvements to behaviour around the school.

Progress in curricular development under the previous leadership was slow especially with regard to broadening the range of opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds. At present, approximately one third of pupils have an opportunity to follow a vocational option, choosing either a business studies course at school or pursuing construction or health and beauty courses with local

providers. The school recognises that more vocational pathways and alternative choices are needed in Key Stage 4.

The work of the chaplaincy provides valuable support to pupils in a variety of ways. For example, the work of the befrienders is well established and provides a good level of support for younger pupils.

The school has comprehensive and well managed systems for setting targets for pupils and monitoring their progress. The ten-weekly assessment cycle provides valuable information about both the performance of individual pupils and achievement in different subjects. Curriculum leaders are increasingly making good use of this to guide, encourage and, where necessary, intervene with pupils. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consistency in the way some teachers make use of this information to match work to the needs of individual pupils and to help them achieve their targets.

The school checks the suitability of adults to work with children but the records of these checks are not held in a single central list. This does not comply with recent guidance and the school is aware that this needs to be addressed urgently.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the previous monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The current arrangements for leadership and management are enabling the school to make satisfactory progress. The senior leadership team have a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses and have introduced systems and procedures which are generating improvement. However, the future arrangements for leadership and management are uncertain.

Steps have been taken to improve the quality of middle leaders and the school can demonstrate that this has, in part, been effective and middle leaders are now held more accountable for standards in their areas of responsibility. The allocation of pupils into sets is decided by heads of departments. The balance between all pupils' academic and pastoral needs is sometimes not weighed up carefully enough, with the result that some lower sets are too big for individuals' needs to be met.

Good use has been made of the expertise of the associate headteacher and the seconded deputy. An effective partnership has been established between the school and the local authority. The positive effects of the actions taken by

the senior leadership team in the short period the members have been responsible for leading and managing the school demonstrate a clear capacity to improve.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the previous monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- eliminate inconsistencies in the implementation of the school's policies – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided a good range of support through its consultants, advisors, acting headteacher, associate headteacher and seconded deputy headteacher. The LA monitoring reports provide a clear picture of progress in relation to the areas for development.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress towards improving the pupils' behaviour. This visit has raised some concerns about the future arrangements for leadership and management and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching to eliminate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion that is good or better.
- Secure the long term leadership and management of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Managing Director of Children, Families and Education Directorate for Kent and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Ellis
H M Inspector