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3 May 2007

Fr M Coyle
Headteacher
Thornleigh Salesian College
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Dear Fr Coyle

Ofsted Monitoring of Grade 3 Schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 May, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 January 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise achievement and standards
- improve aspects of teaching
- strengthen quality assurance systems
- improve responsiveness to the views of parents and pupils.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievements.

This visit considered teaching, achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science; quality assurance systems; and the school's response to parents' and pupils' concerns. Overall leadership and management of school improvement and the effectiveness of the local authority's support were also considered. Discussions were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and the school's SIP. There were meetings with staff from the English, mathematics and science departments. Three quarters of an hour was spent touring the school at lunchtime with the head boy, head girl and their two successors. Nine lessons were seen, three in English, three in mathematics, and three in science. Pupils' books from Years 9 and 11 were sampled. In addition, whole-school and departmental documentation, local authority reports and data were perused.

Data shows that achievement in English is satisfactory to good in both Key Stages 3 and 4. One lesson seen was good and two were outstanding. Pupils' books show conscientious work and some thorough marking. Lessons and books sampled indicate that achievement in the general skills of literacy is at least good. There is effective practice in the English department. The good practice in certain classrooms might profitably be shared more widely within and beyond the department. There have been some helpful interventions to boost pupils' knowledge in preparation for examinations.

Data shows underachievement at both key stages in mathematics. Two good lessons were seen, and one was satisfactory. However, teaching does not always focus sharply on the key rules for tackling problems, for instance the rules of thumb for finding the components in the equation for a linear sequence. Lesson planning does not identify the stepping stones to secure skills (for example, self-checking methods for weaker pupils) and understanding of concepts (such as how an uncertainty range in rounded values leads to subsequent maxima and minima in sums, differences, multiples and quotients). The department is under new leadership and there is a reasonably clear appreciation of what needs to be done. Staff have been diligent in tracking pupils' progress and in providing revision sessions for pupils. However, tighter control of lesson planning is needed, especially in Years 9 and 11. Continued support from the local authority will be required.

In the national tests at age 14, science showed good improvement in 2006. Data shows at least satisfactory achievement at Key Stage 3. Achievement at GCSE is on a par with that in other subjects across the school: there is some scope for improvement. Lessons seen were good. While pupils generally achieve well in lessons, teaching could be further refined. Past learning is not always secured for example, some Year 11 pupils working on cell division had forgotten about the distinction between asexual and sexual reproduction in plants. Greater emphasis could be placed on revision in the starters for lessons. On occasion, pupils could be challenged more, for instance in framing more sophisticated balanced arguments about whether pollution has increased or decreased over the last few decades. The head of department is fairly new to his post and there is enthusiasm for development. There has been helpful tracking of pupils' progress and intervention to boost standards. The department has some helpful lesson plans but continued monitoring of lesson quality is needed. The main agenda for improvement is further refinement of the basics of teaching.

Tracking systems are increasingly helpful in directing intervention. This is aided by some diagnostic assessment, which is used to guide the teaching of individuals and classes. Lesson observations by senior staff has been extensive and evaluation is generally secure. These systems should continue to be refined.

There are indications that pupils are consulted in appropriate ways about school life and proposed changes. A parents' forum has been established which serves as an effective consultative body for feedback to the school on parents' perceptions and as a sounding board for future developments. One area of concern which prompted the

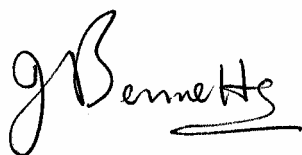
point for improvement in the last Ofsted report seems to have been the efficiency of follow-up on day-to-day communication by parents with the school office or individual teachers. The school might consider a small scale specific survey of current parental satisfaction on this.

Following a period of some instability, the school has been well led and managed over the last few years. This has secured satisfactory progress on the key issues from the last inspection. By the summer of 2006, data already showed significant overall improvement in tests at age 14 and some improvement in overall achievement at GCSE – albeit with a remaining position at both key stages that was markedly weaker than it should be. Things have now moved on further. To have brought about tangible improvement in achievement and standards in a large school over a period of a year is a substantial accomplishment. National tests and GCSE are again likely to show modest improvement in 2007. The improvements that are being made are likely to show greater fruit as Years 7, 8 and 10 work through to examination years. Senior staff have been well supported and encouraged by a vigilant and committed governing body, and the local authority has contributed helpfully to progress.

The school is a harmonious community; pupils show an eagerness for learning and are very positive about school life. Behaviour seen throughout the school, including at lunchtime, was excellent. Pupils take a pride in their work; this is evident in books and, for example, in the high quality products seen in resistant materials. Teachers are dedicated and diligent. Their good efforts need continued perceptive guidance and leadership.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Bennetts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jim Bennetts
Her Majesty's Inspector