

09 May 2008

Mrs M Swinhoe
Acting Headteacher
Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School
Broomfield Avenue
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL7 8UL

Dear Mrs Swinhoe

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils and staff for talking to me throughout the day.

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

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 September 2007, the school was asked to: improve leadership and management; improve support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; increase the level of challenge for the more able pupils, especially in English; and ensure that teachers' systems for assessment and marking of work help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

Shortly after the school was inspected the headteacher resigned. A consultant headteacher took up post in November 2007 and the school is now on an even footing. A permanent headteacher will take up her appointment at the beginning of June 2008. The interim headteacher is tackling all of the areas for improvement with a sense of urgency and determination. The quality of self-evaluation is good and a well thought through school improvement plan is proving to be an effective vehicle in taking the school forward. Above all, the headteacher has secured the support and willingness of the school staff to bring about change. The level of teamwork is high and staff are relishing the responsibilities they have been asked to take on. Staff and governors recognise that the school is improving and are keen to sustain this momentum. The school has been well supported and monitored by the local authority through the school improvement partner, the link adviser and Primary National Strategy consultants.

Good progress has been made in improving leadership and management so that the school has clear direction and takes consistent and effective action to secure improvement and prevent underachievement. The strength of the current leadership is high expectations of pupils and staff, coupled with a good understanding of teaching and learning. In a comparatively short space of time the acting headteacher has carried out a detailed assessment of pupils' learning, followed by swift action to ensure that all pupils have access to an appropriate and challenging curriculum supported by good teaching. Standards of pupil behaviour are now high and attitudes displayed by pupils during lessons are good. These factors are already beginning to impact positively on pupils' performance. Subject coordination has been strengthened and plans are in place to pursue a number of initiatives designed to improve performance in the core subjects. However, the acting headteacher is aware that there is work to do with regard to developing the confidence and knowledge of staff with regard to the role of subject coordinator. The governing body is now better equipped to monitor the work of the school more effectively. Governors are developing the role of 'critical friend' well and are determined not to let the school regress.

The school has made good progress in improving the support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). Pupils with LDD are given good support as befits a school that has at its heart a strong ethos of care, guidance and support for all pupils. Rigorous assessment of pupils has resulted in carefully constructed individual education plans (IEPs), a range of intervention programmes and well matched work within the classroom. Good support from trained teaching assistants means that pupils are experiencing success and are now making good progress. Systems are in place to monitor pupils' progress against achievable targets.

Good progress has been made in increasing the level of challenge for the more able, particularly in English. Teachers plan work based on accurate assessment. Work is consistently matched to pupils' learning needs and expectations are high, particularly of the more able pupils. These pupils are set challenging work which they enjoy. Pupils are proud of their achievements and know that they are improving rapidly. Even though the current Year 6 is a relatively small cohort, the expectation that at least 56% of pupils, higher than the national average in 2007, will attain the higher level 5 in English, is a reflection of the good work that is going on at the school.

The school has worked hard to improve assessment and marking to help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work: as a consequence, they have made good progress. A marking policy is in place and followed by all staff. The quality of marking seen during the visit, particularly in English, was good. It was both informative, with good use of praise and evaluative, leaving pupils in no doubt as to how they could improve. Pupils are now set targets in respect of English and mathematics. They know what they are but most importantly, are conscious of them when undertaking their work on a day-to-day basis. Assessment is now a regular feature of the school's work and systems are now in place to track pupils' progress over time. The acting headteacher is aware that the process of assessing pupils' performance during lessons in order to identify 'sticking points' in their learning, and adapting teachers planning accordingly, needs to be refined.

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 "CR Keeler". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector