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Mrs Michelle Travers
St Bede's Catholic School: A Mathematics and Computing College
Collum Avenue
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Dear Mrs Travers

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 15 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also give my thanks to the governors, the local authority and the students.

As a result of the inspection in November 2007, the school was asked to

- Raise standards attained by the age of 14
- Raise standards in mathematics across the school
- Improve the quality of teaching to increase the proportion of lessons in which students make good or better progress
- Increase the rigour of monitoring and use the outcomes of this process more effectively
- Senior leaders need to evaluate more systematically the outcomes of actions taken to improve provision to ensure they have the intended impact.

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.

The school has responded urgently to the issues identified at its previous inspection. The headteacher and senior leaders show a clear sense of purpose and a determination to take difficult decisions. They are not afraid to adapt and amend strategies, if, during the regular reviews, they are seen not to be having the required impact. Senior leaders are effectively supported by governors who are developing a more robust and challenging role. Efforts are clearly focused on raising standards, especially in mathematics, and improving the quality of teaching. This means that underachievement is being tackled more decisively and senior leaders have a sharper focus on, and understanding of, how well the school is performing.

In addition, the school is taking every opportunity to benefit from the effective support of the local authority. Good relationships exist and the school values its support. Milestones and challenging targets for progress are in place. Consultant help is responsive to the particular needs within the school. Robust evaluation reports provided by the school improvement partner are helping, together with those done by the senior team, to keep the school's progress under review. Clear priorities for further action are identified.

The school is a harmonious community. Staff remain optimistic, teamwork is evident and most staff are increasingly receptive to the expectations of senior leaders. Students are polite, try their best and most are keen to succeed. Their positive attitudes to their learning are ably demonstrated by the increasing number of students taking up places at the various revision sessions available to them.

Students' work, together with school's own data, shows that there are signs of improvement and standards at Key Stage 3 are beginning to rise. Internal assessments are more secure and are regularly reviewed by senior leaders. Nevertheless, despite an expected improvement in results at GCSE level compared to those in 2007, the school is unlikely to meet its agreed targets for five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The school is aware that progress in mathematics is less rapid than improvements in English, because of weaknesses in teaching and leadership of the subject. Progress in raising standards in mathematics across the school is unsatisfactory. The school did not meet its specialist targets for mathematics in 2007 and has not developed curriculum links with primary schools and the community as is expected. The impact of the school's computing specialist status is more apparent. Computers are used across the school and within classes for members of the community as a means to support learning.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Although the school has provided training for all staff, the impact of this work is inconsistent both within and between departments. Good to inadequate teaching, with most being satisfactory, was seen during the monitoring visit. In the best lessons, assessment information was used confidently by teachers to provide appropriate challenge for students. Expectations were high and students were aware of what was expected of them. Marking is helpful and students were engaged in learning. Less progress was made where lessons provided insufficient challenge, activities were mundane and the purpose of the lesson was unclear. As a result some students were passive and inattentive.

Senior leaders have a secure understanding of what constitutes good practice. The school's internal system, together with external reports, indicates that the numbers of inadequate lessons have considerably reduced. A mentoring programme has been introduced and this is helping staff through paired coaching and the sharing of good practice. The school knows that there is not yet enough good or better teaching and is actively working to improve the quality of teaching in those lessons that are only satisfactory.

Middle leaders are held to account for the quality of provision in their subject areas, especially those leading the English, mathematics and science departments. The

school is aware that there is too much inconsistency in the quality of middle leadership. Using data to identify individual students' progress is being undertaken. However not all leaders are confident to interrogate the data and act effectively with the analysis.

Strategic planning at senior level is well coordinated with a clear focus on the identified areas for improvement. Sufficient evidence was seen during the visit to suggest that the school, together with the continued support of the local authority, is moving in the right direction to secure further progress in all areas for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector