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26 September 2008

Mrs C Mason  
Headteacher  
St Aidan's Catholic Primary School  
Holmes House Avenue  
Winstanley  
Wigan  
WN3 6EE

Dear Mrs Mason

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 25 September 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 vice chair of the governing body and to the Year 6 pupils for their willingness to talk with me.

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.

There have been some recent changes to the school's staffing. Two teachers left at the end of the summer term and two teachers are on maternity leave. Two newly qualified teachers and two experienced teachers, including a new Key Stage 2 team leader, took up post in September.

As a result of the inspection on 16-17 January 2008, the school was asked to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 2; set challenging work for the more able pupils in mathematics, especially at Key Stage 2; and deepen teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics to ensure that pupils' misconceptions are tackled quickly.

After the inspection the LA carried out a review of teaching and learning which identified five additional areas for improvement (assessment for learning, raising teachers' expectations, improving the monitoring and evaluation of the mathematics curriculum, the development of subject leadership and the setting of targets) which were added to the action plan.

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

Standards have risen since the inspection in January. The school's data from teacher assessments and the national tests in the summer term of 2008 show that St Aidan's had its highest results for several years, not only in mathematics but also in English and science at Key Stages 1 and 2. The school exceeded almost all of its targets which were raised after a detailed analysis of pupils' progress. This is a notable success for the school.

In mathematics, nearly all pupils in Year 6 reached Level 4, as expected for their age, and 41% reached the higher Level 5. This takes standards from well below average in 2007 to above average (using 2007 figures). Year 2 pupils also did well. The vast majority reached Level 2, as expected for their age, and one in four reached the higher Level 3 compared with one in ten in 2007. In addition, there was an upward shift in the proportion of pupils reaching Levels 2B and 2A. More than half have moved into Year 3 working at a level typical of pupils a year older.

The school's analysis of data from assessment indicates that most boys and girls made good progress over the last school year, most especially in the spring and summer terms. Booster work and focussed teaching accelerated pupils' progress in Year 6 and contributed to 84% of pupils achieving or exceeding their personal targets. Nevertheless, the making up of ground lost in previous years meant that, given their attainment at the end of Year 2, Year 6 pupils made only satisfactory progress overall at Key Stage 2.

In the last school year, inconsistencies in the quality of provision in different year groups resulted in some pupils not making enough progress. The school is aware, for example, that some boys in Year 1 did not do as well as they should. The decision to group pupils by attainment and to teach the older Key Stage 2 pupils in year groups offers the opportunity to tailor teaching and the mathematics curriculum more closely to pupils' needs.

The school and LA have followed their action plans closely. The decision to partner St Aidan's with another primary school, which performs highly in mathematics, has been extremely beneficial. The partner school has shared teaching and management expertise, especially in tracking pupils' progress and ways to help pupils assess their own learning. Coaching and guidance, along with good support and steer from the LA's numeracy consultant, has helped teachers to be aware of what counts as good teaching and learning in mathematics. All have a more informed picture of what pupils need to know at different ages, how to plan and prepare structured lessons and how to mark pupils' work to help them improve. As the quality of teaching and learning is strengthening, so is pupils' enjoyment of mathematics.

The school is on track to meet challenging targets in mathematics in 2009. Pupils' current work confirms that standards are on the rise throughout the school. Many of

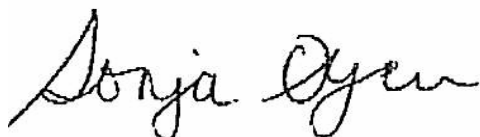
the pupils in Years 2 and 6 are already working at or above the level expected at the end of their school year. Pupils' work is much more neatly presented than in the summer term and pupils' honest comments show where they have coped well or felt they needed additional practice.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are higher. The teachers are tailoring work to match pupils' abilities and they are giving pupils a clear indication of what they need to do to succeed in their learning. There are some inconsistencies to iron out, which arise partly from changes in staffing, but St Aidan's is now well placed to share good practice and to profit further from visits to the partner school and support from its staff. Not all teachers, for example, are equally adept at breaking the learning into clear steps, reminding pupils of what they already know and the key information to remember. This led to some pupils struggling with tasks and also to some superficial plenary sessions when teachers did not pick up on some pupils' insecure learning and/or misconceptions.

Two emerging strengths are the teachers' good use of questions to probe pupils' understanding of number, and their emphasis on strategies that pupils can use to solve problems. In the Foundation Stage, pupils are developing a feel for number and confidence in solving simple problems. Year 1 pupils knew how to check their answers and Year 2 pupils showed a firm grasp of place value. Year 6 pupils drew on their sound knowledge of multiplication tables to explain why some numbers were not prime numbers. In lessons, the frequent use of small whiteboards and talk partners involved all pupils, and in some class discussions, the teachers upped the challenge for the more able with additional problems.

Leadership of the school and of mathematics has sharpened with a clear focus on how well action is having an impact on pupils' progress. The monitoring of classroom practice and pupils' work has identified strengths and areas for development, but the follow up has not always been prompt enough to ensure quick returns. Although governors have kept a close eye on the school's progress since January, their reliance on the headteacher and senior managers for information limits their effectiveness in holding the school to full account.

helpful in promoting improvement in your

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonja Øyen".

Sonja Øyen  
Her Majesty's Inspector