

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Steele
St Edmund Campion Catholic School
Sutton Road
Erdington
Birmingham
West Midlands
B23 5XA

Dear Mrs Steele

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 27 November 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Could you also pass on my thanks to the chair of governors and the students I interviewed for their important contribution.

Since the school was inspected on 30 April and 1 May 2008 the school has appointed several new staff, including a temporary deputy headteacher who has responsibility for leading on teaching and learning.

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 the 30 April and 1 May 2008 the school was asked to:

- Plan lessons to meet the full range of needs, abilities and interests of pupils
- Ensure lesson activities are sufficiently enjoyable and engaging, so that all pupils fully take part and can develop their independent learning skills
- Ensure greater clarity and consistency of marking so that pupils know 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 satisfactory progress.

A scrutiny of students' books, observations of learning in lessons and comments made by students confirm the improvement in standards indicated by the 2008 examination results. Improvements to teaching and more effective interventions with C/D borderline students are largely responsible for this improvement. The school now has a system in place that is providing a better guide as to the progress all students make in every year group. The school has recognised the need to further improve the accuracy of some teacher assessments in order that there is confidence in the robustness of this system. There is evidence that the school is able to act quickly in response to any underachievement. Current progress is not yet sufficient to overcome a long legacy of previous underachievement. Although those students receiving support from the school and external agencies (school action plus) achieve satisfactorily, there continues to be underachievement amongst other lower attaining students.

The school has made good progress, improving the clarity and consistency of marking. Students were very positive about the much better guidance they are now receiving in most subjects. Most students' books contain an accurate appraisal of the extent to which students achieved the learning objective and useful pointers as to how further improvement could be achieved. Some teachers make lessons even more relevant by making explicit links with what they have observed in students' books. A minority of teachers are usefully making time available so students can make a considered response to marking comments. Peer and self-assessment is also developing quite well. However, there is scope for making comments relate even more closely to students' individual targets.

Progress has been made to improve students' enjoyment of lessons. This has largely been achieved through effective whole-school training on teaching and learning. This is complemented well by additional coaching focused on less effective teachers and departments. Most lessons contain a better range of activities than reported previously and these help to maintain higher levels of concentration. Effective leadership is ensuring greater consistency, particularly in English, mathematics and science.

The school's regular monitoring is identifying good practice more quickly. However, not enough attention is given to evaluating the extent to which the learning needs of the full ability range are met. The school's development planning and self-evaluation have not prioritised the students who underachieve the most. A new approach to lesson planning has been adopted in response to an evaluation of the previous learning cycle that was proving to be overambitious. Lesson planning is now more appropriate and is revealing the difficulties some teachers have in consistently identifying lesson outcomes in line with the needs and abilities of all students.

An outstanding plenary session was observed in an art lesson that also reflected the Irish heritage of many of the students. Students concentrated well as the teacher skilfully involved them in evaluating outcomes so they became clear about how they might achieve at a higher level when undertaking art work inspired by Celtic writing.

However, in other lessons not enough attention is paid to ensuring students work at levels that will result in them achieving their targets. Overall, the better teaching is contributing to further improvements in behaviour. Students were also very positive about the green and yellow cards, introduced quite recently to manage behaviour both in lessons and around the school.

The headteacher and local authority (LA) have so far been able to take action to minimise the impact of the gaps in the permanent senior leadership team. The support provided by the LA is good. There has been a perceptive management review highlighting how the school can further build the capacity to improve. The LA supported review of teaching is appropriately critical and recognises the need to ensure a more consistent level of challenge for students. Middle leaders also commented positively on the high quality of support they felt the school was now getting. The revised Statement of Action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector