

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

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



7 November 2008

Mr S Flynn
The Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic School
Willenhall
Darlaston Lane
Bilston
West Midlands
WV14 7BL

Dear Mr Flynn

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 November 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 students, staff, the chair of the governing body and the representative from Walsall Children's Services who met 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.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 October 2007, the school was asked to:

- monitor progress more effectively in mathematics and science and intervene promptly when students are at risk of underachieving
- improve the quality of learning by implementing rigorously the specific actions for improvement identified through lesson observations
- clarify the systems for setting targets and set students targets that are more challenging in subjects.

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 students' achievement.

The unvalidated results of the Key Stage 4 national tests for 2008 show much improvement. The proportion of student gaining at least five GCSE grades at C or above has increased from 46% in 2007, to 59%. Compared with the previous year, a greater percentage of students have attained grades A* to C in English and mathematics. The most significant increase has taken place in science, where the

percentage of students attaining grades A* to C has almost doubled, from 33% to 61.5%. In Key Stage 3, attainment in English has also improved. Unvalidated results show that the percentage of students reaching the standard for their age has increased from 70% in 2007, to 84%. These positive results are due to improvements in teaching and learning, better use of data to identify and provide targeted support for students at risk of underachieving, and well planned intervention programmes. Changes have also been made to the curriculum so that there is an increased emphasis on basic literacy and mathematical skills. Nevertheless, the school is aware that variations in performance remain. For instance, the school's most recent assessment information indicates that students make better progress overall in English than mathematics. Overall standards in mathematics remain below average. The standards reached by students in science and mathematics in Key Stage 3 have not markedly improved since 2007, when they were below the national average. This is due to previous staffing difficulties and slower rates of progress. The school has identified the progress made by students in science and mathematics in Key Stage 3 as continuing areas for improvement.

Staff have responded positively to the range of initiatives introduced by the school and Walsall Children's Services to improve students' learning. Professional development, sharing good practice, targeted interventions to improve key literacy skills, and adapting the curriculum to better meet the needs of students have led to improvements in provision, as confirmed by the much better progress of the older students. Senior staff regularly observe the quality of teaching using agreed criteria. However, the feedback to staff does not always place a sufficient emphasis upon the progress made by students during lessons or prioritise the actions that need to be taken to accelerate progress. Neither do they indicate when the identified actions will be reviewed to ensure weaknesses do not remain. As a result, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching in the school.

Good aspects of the small number of lessons observed included high expectations of students' behaviour and achievement, opportunities for students to engage in discussions, questions that challenged students' thinking, and interesting tasks that lead to high levels of engagement. However, there is not enough consistently good or better teaching throughout the school. Increasing the level of challenge, differentiating tasks, and developing student independence during lessons have all been acknowledged as areas for further development.

The use of data to set challenging end of Key Stages 3 and 4 targets is now well established. As a result, students and staff have a greater understanding of targets in all subjects. However, not all students know what they have to do to achieve their targets. There is some good practice in the school, such as in English and in mathematics in Key Stage 4 where students are provided with detailed guidance, but this process is not yet adequately developed in all subjects. The school has introduced target-setting days for students to attend with their parents. Students value these and say that these days give them and their parents the opportunity to discuss progress towards their targets. The use of targets has yet to have an impact on science and mathematics attainment at Key Stage 3.

Achievement in the school's specialist subjects, business studies and information and communication technology (ICT) is good. The proportion of students selecting business and ICT courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has increased.

Walsall Children's Services have provided an appropriate level of challenge and support. Regular meetings and reviews have enabled areas for development to be identified and suitable advice and guidance to be provided for senior staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector