

11 June 2009

Mrs M Wright
Headteacher
St William's Catholic Primary School
Young Street
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Dear Mrs Wright

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 10 June 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful for the opportunity to meet the chair of governors, and to speak with several pupils. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to them all.

The challenges faced by St William's School remain unchanged in some key respects. A significant number of pupils join the school in later years, some at the very early stages of learning English. The turnover of staff has remained high, resulting in discontinuity for some classes. At the time of the monitoring visit, three out of eight classes were led by supply teachers. However, the school has been able to fill vacant posts and expand the senior leadership team. A new chair of governors has also been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve pupils' achievement, particularly in science
- ensure that teachers' planning, marking and target-setting are consistent and are effective in increasing the rate of pupils' progress
- strengthen actions taken by leaders at all levels in response to their findings from the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
- improve pupils' attendance and punctuality.

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 the pupils' achievement.

The decline in the standards reached by pupils by the end of Year 2 appears to have been halted. Based on assessments made this year, and the quality of pupils' recent work, the improvements indicated by results in 2008 have been sustained. Pupils' progress appears positive in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. As the school's careful analysis indicates, writing remains the weakest of pupils' skills at the end of Year 2.

Standards at the end of Year 6 have been slightly below average over recent years. In 2008, test results indicated some improvement. Expectations for the current Year 6 at the start of the year were low, partly as a result of previously disrupted teaching. However, the school's progress tracking indicates accelerated progress by Year 6 pupils this year, and their standards now appear to be broadly in line with national expectations. Regrettably, the progress in Years 3, 4 and 5 has not been as positive in English, mathematics or science. Within these classes, pupils who are at an early stage of learning English and have learning difficulties tend to make less than expected progress. The school's improved systems for monitoring pupils' progress have effectively identified such risks, and suitable remedial action is being taken. In some cases, where support has been intensified, some recent gains can be seen, but the inconsistency in progress between one class and another has limited overall achievement to date.

An energetic drive to improve the teaching and assessment of science has shown some positive impact on progress. Increasingly accurate assessment and careful tracking of pupils' progress indicate a broadly satisfactory picture, except, again, in Years 3, 4 and 5. The school has identified what underlies the variation and taken suitable action. The steps taken are beginning to improve attitudes and progress. Pupils from a range of classes showed keen interest and developing skill in scientific investigation. Year 5 pupils spoke enthusiastically about their learning in the after-school science club, too. However, in science, as in other subjects, more needs to be done to ensure consistency.

The school's persistent efforts to improve attendance and punctuality have shown a positive effect. A comparison of attendance in the spring term of 2008 with the same period in 2009 shows an improvement of two percentage points to 95%. Attendance thus far in the summer term stands at 96.3%. The school is taking some imaginative approaches to involve parents in this drive, through a new parent council and food voucher incentives. It has appointed a parent involvement worker, and regular contact with the families of persistent absentees has yielded a slow but steady reduction in absences by some pupils.

The school has clarified expectations of planning, marking and target-setting this year. Observation and work scrutiny have been used to check these higher expectations. Monitoring has to date indicated a satisfactory picture except in Years 3, 4 and 5. Marking is regular and more informative. Typically, it now gives pupils feedback on their specific achievements, and what they need to do next. However, as the school recognises, it is rarer to see that pupils or teachers have followed up

these points. Staff have begun using visual displays to help pupils understand their targets and what they need to do to achieve them, as yet, with mixed effect. Pupils' understanding of their targets varies from class to class. There have been regular reviews of pupils' individual progress in English, mathematics and science, and guidance for teachers on assessing accurately and planning for higher challenge. The school's current focus is on the use of assessment to inform planning, so that all pupils are suitably challenged. Instances of good practice were observed, but not all staff were fully aware of this priority. Thus, while improvements are evident, there is some way to go before all teachers are effective in raising achievement rapidly.

The senior leadership team has been strengthened with the appointment this term of an experienced new member. There is a new coordinator for science. This has increased the capacity to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. Data analysis, joint observations and work scrutiny have been conducted systematically. Subject coordinators are gradually taking more responsibility for bringing about improvement in their areas through, for instance, offering science workshops for teachers. Their reports on pupils' progress in literacy, mathematics and science include specific recommendations for class teachers. Additional support has been put in place where needed and monitoring has been persistent. This has not, however, resulted in the expected rapid improvement in every case, indicating a need to check that messages are communicated effectively. With continuing staff turnover, the school is recruiting new staff. Experienced teachers are being deployed strategically to accelerate improvement where it has been sluggish. Careful induction of new staff and mentoring for any newly qualified teachers will need to be a high priority.

Under the leadership of a new chair, the governing body has begun to take advantage of training opportunities and to involve itself more closely in monitoring the school's work. The chair has an up-to-date understanding of the school's work on each of the key issues, having attended monthly meetings to review progress with Education Bradford. There is a clear commitment to accountability: the governors' action plan for improvement has been shared with staff, and governors have had progress data explained to them so they have a realistic understanding of the school's current performance.

Until now, the work of monitoring the school has relied heavily on the involvement of Education Bradford, but the school is now in a position to establish an independent cycle of monitoring and to develop this across all areas of its work. It will be supported by participation in the Improving Schools Programme from September 2009. The local authority had correctly acknowledged a declining trend in the school's performance prior to the inspection and already had in place a series of measures to support the school to tackle identified weaknesses. Its action plan for the school has set suitably urgent and challenging milestones in response to the notice to improve. These have been monitored rigorously, and where improvement has not been judged adequate, support has been intensified. The school has valued the support from human resources, governors' support and educational consultancy services, as well as the opportunity to observe practice in another school. While

further work on aspects of teaching and assessment is clearly needed, evidence suggests that the support for teaching pupils at an early stage of learning English, and for the teaching of early reading and speaking and listening, has made a positive difference to the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector