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1 December 2009

Mrs Lowry
St Bede's CofE Aided Junior School
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Dear Mrs Lowry

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. I would be grateful if you would also pass my thanks on to the staff, pupils and governors for the warmth of their welcome and the significant part they played in the inspection visit.

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

- ensure pupils are provided with opportunities to respond to marking so that they maximise their learning
- improve teaching by ensuring that lessons provide more challenging work, particularly to help pupils reach the higher levels
- develop more incisive evaluation of the impact of strategies used to raise standards.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

satisfactory progress in making improvements

and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection pupil attainment has improved and is now above average while overall progress remains satisfactory with an improving trend. In English pupils

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make good progress as a result of their positive gains in reading. However this good progress is not evident in writing. The school has responded to this difference by developing a whole-school initiative which provides greater opportunities for pupils to write in a more meaningful context through topic work. There is some evidence that this is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of pupils' writing. The above average attainment and satisfactory progress that pupils make in writing, mathematics and science over time means that overall achievement is satisfactory. Other outcomes remain positive since the last inspection. Attendance is above average and pupils report that they feel happy and safe at school; as one child stated, 'Security is good here and there are lots of adults to help look after us.'

The school is able to demonstrate the changes that have taken place in teaching and learning in order to challenge the more-able pupils. Planning in mathematics and literacy now reflects a range of expectations linked to the National Curriculum levels, and expectations are more suitable to the capabilities of the pupils. Pupils are now involved in assessing their own learning in a more focused way and they are beginning to talk about their targets. Parents have had a greater opportunity to become more involved in their children's learning as the school is reporting progress every second term. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the strongest lessons pupils are provided with learning opportunities that are appropriate to their needs and which challenge them. This practice now needs embedding across the whole school, in all subjects and through each part of a lesson. Teachers are becoming more confident in using their prior assessment of pupils' needs to plan for their next steps to learning. As the use of such assessment information is in its infancy the full impact of changes to planning, teacher expectations and pupils' achievement is not yet fully evident.

The school has worked very hard in ensuring that pupils have an opportunity to respond to teachers' marking. A range of strategies has been introduced to provide pupils with quality time to read teachers' comments and respond to them. Monitoring in this area indicates that pupils are beginning to respond to teachers' comments and as a result their work is improving. Pupils greatly value this opportunity; as one child stated, 'It boosts my confidence because I can now remember what I need to do to improve.' The school is now in the process of developing a system which ensures that pupils have an opportunity to respond to marking in all subjects.

Staff and governors have responded positively to the challenge of developing more incisive evaluation systems. The school has developed a cycle of monitoring where all leaders and managers are involved in identifying and evaluating the impact of initiatives on school priorities. Monitoring ranges from lesson observations to the sampling of workbooks and talking to pupils and parents about achievement. Last year the school tackled some underachievement by arranging one-to-one tuition for pupils and making changes to the Year 5 curriculum. As a result of these interventions these pupils made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school has made positive changes to the way in which it now approaches the planning of future priorities by involving all stake holders in this process. Where the School Development Plan is strong it identifies clear and measurable ways to evaluate the success of its work. Leaders use this information when evaluating the impact of their work on the school's effectiveness in some subjects. However this good practice is still not securely embedded or consistent across all subjects. Governors are now holding the school to account. They are involved in monitoring visits to lessons and have established a variety of committees. These include curriculum and inclusion, welfare and environment and finance, staffing and pay. Where appropriate, each committee is using the findings from the last report to challenge the school and monitor progress. They have recently developed an 'achieving and caring plan' which all staff contribute to.

Since the last inspection all staff have made a concerted effort to address the areas for improvement identified in the last report. Consequently, there is growing evidence that pupil achievement is starting to improve. The more-able pupils are now beginning to be challenged as a result of teachers' higher expectations as evident in their lesson planning and from lessons seen. Pupils have greater opportunity to respond to marking and consequently feel more involved in their own learning. Leaders and managers at all levels are beginning to develop better systems for monitoring improvement. Together these changes indicate that the school has made satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity to make further improvements.

The satisfactory support provided by the local authority in assisting the school to respond to the findings of the last inspection has been greatly appreciated. Plans are now being developed to extend this support in the future.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Gadd
Her Majesty's Inspector

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority – Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – except for academies
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.schools@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority – where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

Lead inspector