

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

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Ms A Loftus
Headteacher
St Peter's Catholic Primary School
Firbank Road
Newall Green
Manchester
M23 2YS

Dear Ms Loftus

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 December, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful to the vice chair of the governing body and the local authority for assistance with this visit.

As a result of the inspection on 9 and 10 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- increase attendance rates and reduce levels of persistent absence
- raise standards in mathematics
- enable all pupils, including those with English as an additional language, to make better use of their key skills in all subjects.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The school continues to take a range of appropriate measures to improve pupils' attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence. Staff are working effectively as a team and are taking greater collective responsibility. Specific groups of pupils are targeted, interventions are very well planned and support for vulnerable families is effective. There are frequent meetings between the pupils and the learning mentor and contact with parents is regular and supportive. Pupils are fully aware of the consequences of persistent absence and are encouraged to attend more regularly through special assemblies and certificates and through the 'Punctual Pete' award. In addition, many of them are motivated to attend school more consistently because of improvements in the quality of their learning. 'Lessons are more fun now'. 'We get to

do lots of exciting things'. 'In the morning, I want to get to school as quickly as I can', were typical comments. As a result, the school's attendance rate has increased from 92% to 94% over the last year and levels of persistent absence are reducing over time.

Pupils' current work, as well as the test results for 2009, shows that increasing numbers of pupils are making better progress than previously in mathematics and that standards are beginning to rise. This is also evident from the school's records which track pupils' achievement. For example, the progress pupils make by the end of Year 2 is increasing at the expected Level 2 and at the higher Level 3. A notable success is that 21% of pupils achieved Level 3, which is above the national average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making much better progress than previously in calculations and number work as they move into Year 1. Eighty two per cent of pupils in Year 6 reached the expected Level 4, reflecting the improving impact of the school's intervention and support. In addition, the percentage of pupils making expected levels of progress in mathematics has risen from 63% to 83% over the past year. This is because the school has successfully introduced a range of strategies to raise pupils' achievement, which in turn, is leading to improvements in classroom practice. There are regular reviews of how well pupils are achieving. Tracking systems are more effective in identifying pupils who are underachieving. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make. Teachers are more confident in judging the level of pupils' work and have a better understanding of using assessments to judge what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. As a consequence, the school is much better placed to pin-point how well pupils are achieving and plan appropriate intervention. For example, specific targeting of Year 2 pupils is highly effective in developing pupils' skills in using and applying their knowledge and in deepening their understanding. With excellent prompting from the deputy headteacher one child was able to demonstrate the ability to count forwards and backwards in fives and tens and confidently identify odd and even numbers.

Nevertheless, the school is aware that standards for more-able pupils at Level 5 are not yet high enough. This is because many of the school's initiatives to accelerate pupils' progress further have not had sufficient time to make a significant difference to their achievement.

Another factor contributing to rising standards in mathematics is the increasing progress pupils make in lessons as a result of improvements in teaching and learning. A whole-school focus on training and developing teachers' awareness of effective practice is increasing opportunities for pupils to be more engaged in their work and to work independently. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have the confidence to stand back and allow the pupils to direct their own learning and make decisions with carefully crafted opportunities to discuss and share their ideas with others. For example, pupils in Year 6 were challenged in their ability to put forward a persuasive argument by encouraging each other to eat more fruit and live more healthily. They also debated whether teachers should give detentions, the high price of petrol and whether footballers get paid too much.

Much of the improvement in pupils' learning is because the school has strengthened the way in which it checks on the quality of teaching and judges the effectiveness of learning. Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress in books are clearer. Lesson observations by senior staff routinely focus on the progress pupils make in lessons. In addition, there are some good examples in teachers' marking where pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work and reach the next level, but this is not yet consistent across the school.

The school is working hard to encourage all pupils, including those with English as an additional language to use their skills in other subjects. A curriculum review has begun and observations of key skills in history and geography have raised the awareness of staff to plan more appropriate opportunities for pupils in lessons. Subject leaders for foundation subjects have looked closely at pupils' work to identify good practice to share with colleagues. Links with other schools have been established and staff are benefiting from training in developing pupils' writing skills across the curriculum. As a consequence, work in pupils' books shows greater demand, stimulus and activity. For example, pupils in Year 5 were challenged to write about the symbols of Sikhism, to recount the events of the Battle of Marathon and to record the similarities and differences between schools of today and those in ancient Greece.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding arrangements and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements.

Considering the good advances made since its last inspection and along with its other strengths, including the excellent leadership of the headteacher and the strong focus on raising achievement and improving pupils' learning, the school has rapidly strengthening capacity for sustained improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector