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13 November 2009

Mrs Elaine Richardson
St Augustine's Catholic Primary School
Conwy Court
Castlefields
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Cheshire
WA7 2JJ

Dear Mrs Richardson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 November 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also extend my thanks to the local authority and Diocesan advisors, the staff and pupils with whom I met.

Since the time of the last inspection the headteacher has left the school to take up a position at another school. The governors started the recruitment process immediately but have not made an appointment yet. Currently there is an acting headteacher (previous deputy headteacher) and an acting deputy headteacher (previous senior teacher) in post. Two teachers previously involved in job share arrangements now each have responsibility for an individual class. On the days these teachers are off-site the acting deputy headteacher takes their classes.

As a result of the inspection on 13-14 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that pupils are involved in assessing their own work and setting their own targets for improvement, so as to raise standards, particularly in writing by the end of Years 2 and 6
- develop the role of key workers in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improve the planning of outdoor activities to ensure that they promote children's learning and development.

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.

Unvalidated results of the 2009 Key Stage 1 national assessments show a marked rise across the board compared with outcomes in 2008. Standards rose from well below average in 2008 to average in 2009, representing good progress for these pupils, given their starting points. Outcomes (unvalidated) of the Key Stage 2 national tests were similarly positive with an improvement from very low in 2008 in the core subjects to below average in 2009, representing satisfactory progress from pupils' starting points. However, the improvement in mathematics was relatively weaker compared to English and science, with attainment in this subject moving from very low to well below. Action taken by the school to tackle previous underachievement is starting to have a very positive effect on attainment by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6. This is a consequence of improvements the school has made to the quality of its provision. The school's tracking system indicates that most of the current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach the levels expected for their age in English.

The improvement in attainment is due to a concerted effort to involve pupils more in their learning, assessing their own work and setting future targets for improvement. The school has been part of the local authority's Intensive Support Programme and staff, including teaching assistants, have received much training in using effective strategies for helping pupils check their own work. This included training on the 'big write' which teachers incorporate into their literacy lessons. Lesson planning has been reviewed and more resources have been purchased to ensure that pupils have the necessary equipment. Older pupils explain confidently the process they use to measure their learning, identify a new target and how they know when they have achieved it. This is particularly so in writing, where older pupils know the National Curriculum level they are working at and what is necessary to achieve the next level; pupils talk confidently about their 'levels'. As a result attainment in writing is improving across the school. Attainment in this subject at Key Stage 1 rose to above the local authority level and in line with the national average. At Key Stage 2 in 2009, 69% of pupils reached the expected levels for their age compared to 7% in 2008.

The role of the key workers in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been clarified. The local authority has enabled the school to observe its leading teacher for the Early Years Foundation Stage. The teaching assistant has responsibility for a group of children. The class teacher and teaching assistant work collaboratively establishing long term and weekly planning. Both are involved in planning interesting activities for learning, assessing work and contributing to the children's profiles. Although planning for the outdoor area is now in place, this is still at an early stage of development. Planned activities and resources are limited and do not fully inspire children to follow their own curiosity and set challenges for themselves. Senior leaders have recognised that there is work to be done to improve this aspect of the school's work and have applied for funding to support improvements.

The appointment of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher has allowed for much needed continuity. They work as a team with complimentary skills and have taken positive action to further improve the school. There is a focus on raising achievement and they acknowledge that there is still much to do to improve. As a result of an analysis of the 2009 assessment information, the school has prioritised mathematics as an area for improvement. The school development plan aligns action to the mission statement and priorities are apt. However, it lacks sharpness in measurable outcomes which restricts its use in evaluating the progress the school is making against targets. Governors are supportive of the school and are vigorously recruiting for the most appropriate headteacher to take the school forward.

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

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector