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Mrs B Nesbit
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Baffam Lane
Selby
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Nesbit

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 January 2010, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils, governors and School Improvement Partner for taking time to meet with me and to the local authority adviser for the telephone discussion.

Since the last inspection in February 2008, after a period of unsettled leadership, a new headteacher took up post in January 2009. There have been significant changes to the governing body, with the appointment of several new governors. Mobility has increased, with 20% of Year 5 and 6 pupils arriving new to the school. There has been an increase in the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has doubled and a number of Eastern European pupils who speak English as an additional language have been admitted.

As a result of the inspection on 04 and 05 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- provide a clear plan for improvement, which prioritises measurable gains in pupils' achievement
- make the school's self-evaluation more rigorous, ensuring that action taken to improve pupils' achievement can be measured
- refine the systems for checking pupils' progress to ensure that the information provides an accurate picture of the attainment of all pupils
- build on the good practice seen in writing, by improving the guidance given to pupils about their achievements and what they need to do to improve.



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.

The school has responded positively to the issues identified at its inspection in February 2008. The headteacher, with the support of senior leaders and governors, is tackling the main issues facing the school with rigour and determination. She has worked with staff, pupils and governors to create a long-term vision for the school. The school improvement plan has accurately identified what the school needs to do to improve and how the success of planned actions can be measured. Subject leaders have produced individual action plans which identify improvements they wish to make in their subjects. However, a few of these do not focus sharply enough on raising pupils' achievement.

The school's self-evaluation procedures have improved. The headteacher and assistant headteacher have scrutinised lesson plans and pupils' work. The headteacher has carried out joint lesson observations in each class with a local authority adviser. This support has been successful in endorsing the accuracy of the headteacher's judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. The views of pupils have been sought and careful analysis of the tests taken by pupils in the summer term has identified that writing and aspects of mathematics, such as mental mathematics and problem solving, are weaker. These have been identified as areas for improvement within the school improvement plan and daily sessions of mental mathematics have been incorporated into each class timetable. The headteacher identified that handwriting and the presentation of pupils' work was poor and, as a result, a whole-school system has been put in place, including the use of a fluent joined script. This strategy has been successful, as work in books shows that pupils' writing is now neat and well presented. Pupils take a pride in their work. There is now a whole-school focus on teaching phonic sounds and daily sessions are held with pupils across the school being grouped according to need. Pupils say these sessions are fun and are helping them make better progress in learning their sounds. Regular meetings about pupils' progress are held with class teachers and staff are held to account for the progress made by the pupils in their class. Pertinent questions are asked as to why some pupils may not be making the progress of which they are capable. As a result, pupils who need it are given targeted support to help them improve, often by skilled teaching assistants. Some senior leaders are involved in monitoring and evaluating the work in their subjects or areas of responsibility. However, the roles of some middle leaders are not yet fully developed. Governors are supportive of the work of the school, have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and are developing their role as 'critical friend'. However, they have limited opportunities to evaluate the quality of provision and the outcomes for pupils for themselves.

Self-evaluation procedures have been enhanced by the introduction of more effective tracking systems. These clearly identify which pupils need support to help them improve and demonstrate how much progress pupils are making towards their

end of year targets. These systems are used effectively to set challenging targets for pupils. Much work has been done within the school to ensure that teachers' assessments are more accurate. Staff have benefited from opportunities to moderate samples of work and share good practice with staff from other schools. Although there is still more work to be done in this respect, improvements have been made. However, the provisional assessments by teachers at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2009 are lower than those in previous years, particularly in mathematics. These have been checked by the local authority and judged to be accurate.

The headteacher and assistant headteacher took effective action to address the reasons for the dip in standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008. As a result, standards rose again in 2009, although significantly fewer pupils than nationally attained the higher level in mathematics. The school has introduced a 'superstar challenge' for more-able pupils to enable them to reach their full potential. This has been successful and now other pupils aspire to participate in more challenging work. Although the school has welcomed pupils new to the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, careful analysis shows that some are not yet making the amount of progress or reaching the standards the school would like. Also, fewer pupils make the expected progress in mathematics and writing than in reading and science across the school.

Successful steps have been taken to improve the academic guidance for pupils to enable them to understand how to improve their work. Marking is now consistent across the school in all subjects and identifies what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils say that they find marking helpful, but they do not always have an opportunity to correct their work. All pupils have individual targets and they know what they have to do to achieve them. Pupils say that targets are challenging and they find them helpful in indicating what they need to learn next. Older pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to achieve the next level and this has raised their aspirations.

The headteacher has a very clear understanding of how pupils learn and what they need to do to improve and this has been shared with all staff. However, the quality of teaching remains satisfactory with some that is good. In the best lessons there is a brisk pace with constant changes of activity to keep pupils motivated and interested. Staff have high aspirations and pupils respond to the level of challenge presented. Work is matched closely to the individual needs of pupils and they have a good understanding of what they need to do to achieve. Pupils work cooperatively in groups and pairs and there are good opportunities for discussion with 'talk partners' to help consolidate their understanding. As a result, the rate of progress made by pupils in these lessons has increased. In satisfactory lessons the pace of learning is slow and assessments on pupils' individual achievements are not always accurate enough to plan work which precisely meets pupils' needs and individual learning styles. In these lessons pupils do not make as much progress as they are capable of. The leaders in the school are fully aware that the rate of progress is not consistent

across the school and that more pupils need to make accelerated progress in order to raise standards further.

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

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

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector