

25 June 2010

Mrs Frances Curless
Headteacher
St Alban's Catholic Primary School
Bewsey Road
Warrington
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WA5 0JS

Dear Mrs Curless

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 24 June 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils who met with me and to the group of governors who attended a meeting at short notice.

As a result of the inspection on 18–19 November 2009, the school was asked to

- Build the school's capacity to work independently of external support by improving the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels and by ensuring that:
 - all staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and share a commitment to securing the school's capacity for sustained improvement
 - monitoring and evaluation arrangements are rigorous, outcomes are clearly recorded and addressed with clear links made to the implementation of robust improvement planning
 - the governing body regularly reviews and evaluates the school's provision and contributes effectively to setting its strategic direction.
- Raise standards in science by ensuring:
 - there are regular planned opportunities for pupils to take part in practical investigations
 - pupils have plenty of opportunities to discuss their tasks and record their work independently.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:



- all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons
 - assessment information is consistently used to adjust lesson planning and teaching so that work is precisely tailored to pupils' needs and abilities, in particular the more able
 - all teachers use questioning that challenges pupils to think deeply about their learning.
- Enable pupils to know what progress they have made in their lessons and how to improve their work by ensuring that:
- time is provided for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt
 - there is an agreed system which provides plentiful opportunities for pupils to evaluate their work, either by themselves or with a partner
 - pupils' learning targets are clear, closely matched to their abilities and inform them of the next steps to improve their learning
 - marking consistently matches the quality of the best practice.

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.

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the last inspection. An executive headteacher has worked alongside the school's leadership team for the equivalent of two or three days a week for the last five months. Support from local authority advisers and the School's Improvement Partner has continued to be extensive and targeted on several fronts. These include: Early Years Foundation Stage, English, mathematics, science and inclusion, for example, in mapping and planning appropriate provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. The impact of all this support is beginning to achieve the desired result: the skills and confidence of senior and middle leaders are improving significantly and there have been positive developments in the overall quality of teaching across the school. As a result, the school's capacity to improve independently of local authority intervention, which will be reduced during the next academic year, is much better than at the time of the last inspection. Teamwork is evident as staff are committed to working together to share ideas and improve their own skills. A vision for improvement is emerging and middle leaders are gaining confidence in monitoring and evaluating progress in their areas of responsibility. They greatly appreciate the dedicated leadership time they are given towards their fulfilment of these key roles. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are taking a more confident lead in driving improvement across the school, with rigorous systems now in place to hold staff to account for the progress made by pupils in their care. School improvement planning is more focused on the outcomes of increasingly accurate self-evaluation. The governing body is fully involved in this and is now better equipped to challenge the school and hold leaders to account for its performance. Governors acknowledge that a step change for the



better has taken place, in terms of strengthening committee structures and systems, enabling them to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively. The School Improvement Group, with members including governors, leaders and local authority representatives, meets regularly and has been particularly influential in driving a more rapid pace of improvement.

Although it is too early to see its impact on raising standards in science, there are now more opportunities for pupils to explore science through practical investigations. The subject leader has started to monitor planning, lessons and pupils' work to check that this is happening, and pupils report that they do more practical work in science lessons. Pupils who spoke with the inspector also agree that they have more opportunities to discuss their work and are expected to do more of their work independently of the teacher. Observations during this monitoring visit indicate that this is a fairly accurate view, although there is more scope to develop these features in some lessons.

Teachers are raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. The quality of teaching is improving as a result of well-focused professional development and sharing of good practice, both within the school and in partnership with other local schools. Teachers have positively embraced these opportunities and the regular observations of their work in order to raise the proportion of good teaching. The monitoring activities undertaken by the headteacher and deputy headteacher have given them a detailed and accurate view of the common strengths and areas for development in teaching across the school. For example, some of the positive features, also observed during this monitoring inspection, include: planning and the use of resources, for example, information and communication technology; a better balance between teacher talk and pupil activity; lesson objectives shared with pupils and reviewed at various points to prompt learning; challenge activities for more-able pupils; a more brisk and lively pace, and positive reinforcement of good behaviour. Senior leaders' audit of the use of assessment information has correctly identified where further work is needed for teachers to fine-tune their use of this in lessons, so that work is more consistently well matched to all pupils' needs. In addition, they acknowledge the need to develop further teachers' use of well-targeted and challenging questions for individual pupils to check and deepen their understanding.

Pupils are generally aware of their targets for improvement and of what progress they are making in lessons, although the school's own monitoring identifies that there is room to develop this further. For example, an astute evaluation of progress in literacy found that limited time is currently provided for pupils to reflect and act upon teachers' marking comments. Although much improved, the opportunities for pupils to engage in self- and peer-assessment are not yet as regular as they might be. Pupils who spoke with the inspector in a meeting or in classes had variable knowledge of their targets for improvement. Some targets are not specific enough to inform individual pupils of exactly what they should do in order to move forward towards the next level appropriate to their needs.



The local authority's statement of action has been evaluated and it fulfils the requirements. It makes clear the authority's concerns about aspects of the school's work prior to the previous inspection, so that intervention and support strategies were already in place and adjustments to these were made quickly. The work of the executive headteacher has made a significant contribution to speeding up the rate of improvement in leadership and governance.

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

Marguerite McCloy
Her Majesty's Inspector