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Mr Graham
Headteacher
St Edmund's Catholic School
Arundel Street
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Hampshire
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Dear Mr Graham

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Edmund's Catholic School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 March 2012 and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks also to the students and to the governors I met during my visit, for their valuable contributions.

There have been no significant changes to the context in which the school is working since the previous inspection. Within the school, you have redefined senior team roles and reorganised the special needs department.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 September 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing these issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

You have ambition and vision for the school. You are prioritising the school's developmental needs accurately and effectively and ensuring that all improvements in provision ultimately drive better achievement and better teaching. Students see this, and they value it. As a consequence, achievement across the school is improving. The results of assessments already taken for the 2012 examinations, and early entry examination results, demonstrate that a higher proportion of students will be awarded five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics this summer, than in 2011. This means that the school will continue the trend of improved performance over the last three years. Existing strengths in English are being built on, and outcomes in mathematics are beginning to show improvement from the low achievement at the previous inspection. There is more work to be done in mathematics: the long tail of under-performance in some year groups must be

addressed. Attainment in other areas of the curriculum is also improving, especially in information and communication technology, religious education, languages and physical education. The progress made by students in science is still a concern because of weaknesses in the curriculum structure and in some of the teaching.

This improving achievement is supported by the school's better concentration on the performance of groups of students. Each group has its staff 'champion', who uses the new systems adopted to record and manage student achievement to track the progress of groups closely, and requires intervention when necessary. The progress made by students with disabilities and those with special educational needs is improving because of better provision for them in lessons and in the special needs department.

The proportion of teaching that is good or better is improving gradually and securely across all departments. The range of teaching strategies used is broadening, and more staff are beginning to use new techniques confidently and effectively. For example, because of the school's emphasis on the use of assessment during lessons, many staff now use better questioning techniques, involve students in assessing their own and others' progress and obtain feedback from starter activities in order to inform them about how the next stages of a lesson should be managed. The good teaching in the school does this fluently, and more of the teaching that is still satisfactory is beginning to reflect aspects of this good practice. Currently you and your senior team are taking a strong lead on improving teaching. You assess its quality accurately and have a good sense of what needs doing to improve it. The recently appointed 'teaching champions' have the capacity to continue developments such as these across all classrooms and to make the necessary improvements in the consistency of practice across departments.

Students now have a clear sense of their personal targets in all subjects. They value this knowledge, and the capacity it gives them to make better progress. More of the marking is giving clear feedback to students about how to improve their work; this is associated with the clearer learning outcomes established in many lessons. There is a growing emphasis on students demonstrating more resilience and independence, but this is still an area for improvement. Group work is not managed consistently across the school. Plans are in place to develop homework to improve participation and allow for greater creativity and independence.

More parents and carers now feel that their views are sought and valued by the school through a wider range of strategies, including a text-based system, coffee mornings and questionnaires. The school has also instigated new ways of working with parents and carers to help them support their child's progress, including the 'specially invited parents' evenings' and other events. Students demonstrate a greater commitment to the school and feel that, in the words of one in Year 11, 'the school prepares me better for exams, but also better for the future now'. There is still little strategic involvement of students or parents in developmental work in the

school, for example in improving the quality of learning and independence of learning.

The school makes good use of external support. The local authority, together with representatives from the diocese, oversees the progress made against all of the key areas for improvement from the last inspection at termly progress review group meetings. You value this way in which high levels of accountability for improvement are maintained, and support is provided through this means. You have also engaged consultancy support from neighbouring outstanding schools to good effect, especially in ensuring consistency in judgements of the quality of teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2011

- Raise achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 so that students' attainment meets the national average for five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics.
- Rapidly increase the rates of progress of all students by:
 - increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching throughout all departments by July 2012
 - deeply embedding effective use of assessment to ensure that planned work provides high levels of challenge in lessons
 - providing more opportunities for students to work independently and with others so they take greater responsibility for their learning
 - developing teachers' skills in providing high quality and challenging feedback, both verbally and in marking, so that students know exactly what to improve and how.
- Increase the involvement of all stakeholders, including students, parents and carers and staff, by systematically and regularly capturing their views and ideas to inform decisions about whole-school improvement.