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Mrs Sims
The Headteacher
Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Sims

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 February, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils and governors for their help during the day.

The school has suffered from serious staffing problems for a number of years which have included high levels of long term illness. It has struggled to cover these losses with high quality staff. Members of the senior leadership team were among those absent. The senior leadership team was reorganised for September 2008 and since this time staffing has been stable. Some year groups have in the past been taught by a number of different teachers and this has disrupted their learning.

As a result of the inspection on 15 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics, by ensuring consistently good teaching, especially in terms of its pace and the feedback on the progress that pupils receive through marking
- raise standards by improving the monitoring role of subject leaders
- improve behaviour by ensuring that all staff share information about pupils with behavioural difficulties
- work more closely with parents to ensure that they are fully involved in their children's learning and that rates of attendance are improved.

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.



Behaviour observed during the visit was good. The school was orderly and calm. Older pupils commented very positively on the improvement in behaviour and were enthusiastic about the green charts for good behaviour and the termly rewards. They acknowledge that the very few cases of disruptive behaviour were diminishing. This is supported by data on exclusions which shows they have declined dramatically during the current academic year.

The school has put in place a range of strategies to improve writing and mathematics and, as a result, standards have improved at the end of Year 6. However, at the end of Year 2 standards have continued to decline in all three core subjects and are exceptionally low. Standards fell most in writing. No pupils achieved the higher Level 3 in any subject. This decline reflects the severe staff difficulties the school has faced. Pupils made inadequate progress. National tests taken by Year 6 pupils show a fluctuating trend and standards were exceptionally low and below the national average in 2007. Unvalidated data for 2008 shows an improvement, with more pupils achieving the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics. Standards were high in reading and hence just above the average in English overall. However, writing remains a weakness, with standards well below average. Despite the increase, standards remain below the average in science and mathematics. The 2008 results show some stark gender differences. Girls achieved significantly better at the higher Level 5 in English, whereas boys did much better in mathematics and science. Targets were exceeded for English and hence pupils made good or better progress, but targets were not met for mathematics or science. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, assessment suggests that progress is satisfactory despite a declining trend in all areas. There have been some inaccuracies in assessment and, as a result, in the data used to measure pupils' progress.

Action taken to strengthen teaching shows the quality of lessons is improving. While teaching is securely satisfactory there are an increasing number of good features. Teaching observed during the visit displayed a good range of structured activities which were well resourced. There were good relationships between teachers and pupils. The good use of the interactive whiteboard engaged pupils in their learning effectively. Pupils were generally enthusiastic in lessons and responded well to starter activities. However, planning did not always clearly identify the tasks appropriate for the range of different abilities. In some lessons pupils spent too long on the carpet and this left less time for the main activity or task. Partner work was not always effective and questions were not directed at pupils to ensure they were all engaged. Groups working independently on a task are not always given high enough expectations of how much work needed to be completed and in what time frame. There was a tendency for these groups to be less productive. Teaching assistants continue to be used well in all lessons to support individuals and groups of pupils.

Marking in books shows a consistent approach which is well understood by pupils and is firmly established. Some of the best marking in literacy clearly identifies the next steps in learning. For example, urging pupils to remember to use capital letters and full stops moves learning forward. However, the quality of comments are



variable across subjects and some do not sufficiently guide improvement. There is insufficient time built into lessons for pupils to respond to the comments highlighted for improvement by teachers. An examination of current pupils' work reveals that the quality of writing remains a weakness throughout the school. Pupils are aware of their targets and refer to the success walls to identify what they need to achieve.

Satisfactory progress has been made in strengthening the monitoring and evaluation roles of subject leaders. The literacy leader has only been in place since September 2008. Subject leaders conduct lesson observations and undertake a scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning. All of these activities provide helpful evidence for the quality of provision. However, senior leaders are still embedding a rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation and recognise the need to address issues like the pace in lessons, planning for differentiation, and a focus on monitoring the marking of targeted groups. With the stable staffing now in place, the school is in a position to ensure consistency of practice. Pupils' attainment and progress are tracked effectively and this is being used to identify any pupils who may be underachieving, and thus the school is putting in place appropriate intervention strategies.

Attendance has improved to 94.2% due to the extensive efforts made by the school. This is echoed by pupils who talk about the regular celebration of good attendance. The school also works on improving the punctuality of a minority of pupils through effective support from a learning mentor and family support worker. It has made considerable efforts to engage parents in the learning of their children. Parent workshops are better attended by parents of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage but less so in the older year groups. Not all targeted parents attend. The school has also recruited a small number of parents to help with reading. In addition, weekly newsletters go out to parents with positive cards and positive phone calls home. Governors are well informed about the work of the school and have openly engaged with parents, holding meetings once a term. While the numbers attending these meetings is improving, it is still low. Parents have many opportunities to raise issues with the headteacher and governors.

Local authority support has been effective in establishing a detailed plan to raise achievement but has been limited in providing support to improve the attendance of persistent absentees.

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

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector

