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Mrs G Booth
Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School
Tunstall Bank
Sunderland
SR2 0SX

Dear Mrs Booth

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 29 September 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the students we talked with and to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Local Authority representatives.

There have been significant changes to the leadership of school. The Principal resigned in December 2009, one Vice Principal retired and another has taken a post at a different school. An acting Principal was appointed in January 2010 and was supported by a Headteacher and a retired Deputy Headteacher from neighbouring Church of England schools. There are several new middle leaders, including those responsible for mathematics and English. Eleven teachers have joined the school since the previous inspection and 8 have left. The school roll has declined from 911 at the time of the previous inspection to 821.

As a result of the inspection of 4 March 2009, 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 has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

After the very disappointing GCSE examination results of summer 2009, the school together with the Local Authority drew up a plan of action to ensure performance improved. In 2010 the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A* - C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics rose to 61%, an improvement of 24 percentage points. In almost all subjects there was a significant rise in the proportions of students gaining a grade C or above. Most results are now in line with, or exceed, national averages. The proportion of students gaining the highest



grades has also improved. Current school data indicates that all groups of students are making at least satisfactory and improving progress and achievement.

The lessons sampled during the inspection demonstrated some good teaching. Students' learning was at least satisfactory in all the lessons observed and many developed good skills, understanding and knowledge across a range of subjects including mathematics and English. A joint observation carried out with the headteacher indicated that the system to judge the quality of lessons has improved. However, a few school observation records are over generous in their evaluation of the quality of learning. Due to the implementation of a robust new system, teachers have access to accurate assessments of students' prior attainment. Most teachers use this information to plan work which meets the needs of all students. In most of the lessons observed higher-ability students were accurately identified and were working on challenging tasks. However, in a minority of lessons teachers spent too long describing levels and assessment criteria. This slowed learning and detracted from the subject matter and enjoyment. Scrutiny of marking showed a general improvement although there remains some inconsistency in the follow up of advice given.

The system to support the work of middle leaders has improved. They have received much appropriate advice and guidance on the criteria to use when evaluating the rate of students' progress and the work of their departments. As a result their overall effectiveness has improved and they are having a much more positive impact on outcomes for students.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures by scrutinising the single central record and found this to be secure.

The school has received outstanding support from the local authority during a time of great turbulence. The work of the various advisors and temporary leaders ensured that the school made the much needed improvement to outcomes for students. The new headteacher, governors and senior staff have already begun to build upon these foundations and demonstrate a good capacity to take this work further.

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

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009.

- Ensure that all teachers have an accurate understanding of students' prior attainment.
- Use information gained from day-to-day and longer term assessments to plan work which meets the needs of all students and challenges the most able.
- Improve the effectiveness of middle leaders to ensure that agreed initiatives are implemented consistently in all classes and departments and that the few remaining weaknesses are eradicated.