

Basic Skills Quality Mark Programme – Visit Feedback Report

School name	ST GREGORYS MIDDLE SCHOOL		
Headteacher	Frances Topa		
School and/or HT email	stasmyth@st-gregorys.beds.sch.uk	Tel no	01234 268649
Alliance QM Assessor	GILL CLARKE	Visit date	23.01.13

Purpose of Visit	Initial Assessment
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The Assessor spoke with the following people

Headteacher and/or Senior Leaders YES	Literacy Subject Leader YES	Numeracy Subject Leader YES	Assessment Manager YES
SENCo YES	Pupil representatives YES	Governor representative(s) YES	Parent representative(s) YES

'Learning Walk' completed? YES	Relevant evidence-base reviewed? YES
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Suggested areas for development in preparation for the next Quality Mark visit:

- Continue to develop communication skills across the school by advancing the provision of the Expressive Arts Curriculum. Take advantage of greater planned learning opportunities for pupils to express themselves through high quality drama, music and performance.
- Consider expanding technology resources to include hand held equipment such as i-phones and i-pads to encourage cross curricular use of technology.
- Consider a handwriting audit across the school with a view to improve presentation skills and to support continuity and progression in handwriting.

'Good practice' identified in relation to the 10 Elements of the Quality Mark:

- St Gregory's Middle school demonstrates many outstanding features. The senior leadership team uses its extensive skills in a relentless drive for improvement. The enthusiasm for growth in learning and pupil achievement permeates throughout the school from staff, pupils and parents. The faith school community supports and cultivates the ambition and determination to deliver the very best that education can offer. The Headteacher and key members of staff lead and motivate the school community in the pursuit of excellence.
- St Gregory's Middle School is part of an innovative federation of four Catholic schools, one middle, one primary, one secondary and a first school. The work of each school is research based, led by a dynamic Executive Principal and strong Governing body.
- The preparation for the initial assessment of the Basic Skills Quality Mark by the school has been exemplary. Documentation, pupil books, assessments, data and policies were readily available and demonstrated excellence in assessment, target setting, monitoring and evaluation. Policies are up to date and are subject to regular evaluative reviews. The school development plan is concise and shows a clear vision for future developments. Development of the basic skills permeates policy documents. The leadership of both the English and maths curriculum at KS2 and KS3 is rigorous, enthusiastic and clearly focused on improvement. There is healthy competition between the subjects in addition to supportive advice and cooperation. Particularly impressive was the strength of data for KS2 and the knowledge of individual's achievement by the Assistant Headteacher. Monitoring and self-evaluation is an important aspect of daily school life. Book scrutiny is moderated for next step marking and levels of achievement. Joint learning walks are undertaken to support higher expectations and raised levels of achievement.
- Attainment in English and maths is strong at KS2, with many pupils making good or better progress. The challenge for the school is to see the accelerated progress continue through into KS3. The capacity to achieve this is good due to the very supportive team work within the school and the talented newly appointed Assistant Headteacher for KS3. The current school target for KS3 is an aspirational 2 levels progress. There is a drive towards ensuring that the basic skills are maintained and reinforced through all other subjects. The science, music and sports curriculum are worthy of special note. During the learning walk very good use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) learning styles were seen in these subjects.
- Underachievement is tackled in a personalised approach. The SENCO has a very able team often based in the Inclusion Centre. All staff interviewed felt a sense of responsibility when asked about underachievement. With one voice they supported the statement that failure is 'not an option'. Teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants have good access to the best training opportunities. They

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explained that because all staff know every individual child so well and data tracking is so sophisticated, pastoral and achievement issues are addressed before becoming a problem.

- The Inclusion Centre is used widely by a range of pupils. During the visit pupils were observed using the lunch time sessions for homework activities. Another pupil was using the space for reflecting on the type of behaviour he would choose to use. Pupils throughout the school were polite, engaged in learning and demonstrated consideration to others. It was noted during the visit that assemblies are used as a powerful tool to set standards of behaviour and learning. Staff mentioned the Monday Headteacher's assembly which clearly sets a positive tone for the coming weeks learning objectives. During which she thanks the pupils for their imminent hard work and commitment to future learning.
- Teaching and learning elements are reported to be generally good or better. In every class visited the pupils were experiencing vibrant enthusiastic teaching and learning. In rooms where staff were preparing for lessons, the conversations were centred around curriculum issues or individual pupil needs. It is clear as one observes the lessons that staff value the need to motivate pupils and to ensure learning is relevant and meaningful. A particular strength noted during the visit was the depth and open ended questioning by the teachers. These deep questioning skills strengthened pupils understanding and assured assessment for learning opportunities. Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) is used consistently across the school. Gaps in learning are plugged by the use of one to one sessions and group work. The teaching assistants are used extremely well and are imperative to raising standards of achievement. Some very good examples of mini plenaries and self-reflection time were seen during lessons. At its best staff gave value and importance to these times.
- Resources are carefully thought through and used well. The wipe clean individual white boards are particularly appropriately used in KS2. These are used well to keep lessons at a good pace and pupils engaged. Another well used strategy for learning is the use of talk partners and pupil discussion time. It was refreshing to see such good communication skills being used in English and maths lessons.
- Of special note must be the library facilities. Both staff and pupils were eager to explain how the current librarian has energised and improved the school library. Competitions and various activities and projects are now on offer to raise pupils' love of books and literature. The 'comment tree' has developed pupils' interest in topical newspaper reporting. During the visit pupils were keen to use the facilities in the lunch time period.
- Interactive whiteboards were being used well in most classrooms.
- During the visit students were keen to talk about the school and their learning. They were very approving of the schools methods of teaching, the curriculum and how the school kept them safe. They had no hesitation in voicing their own unique views on the

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subjects presented. The discussions affirmed the view that 'pupil voice' is a strong element in school improvement.

- The curriculum has been centred round the needs of the pupils. It is broad and offers the opportunity to deepen pupils understanding. The school is understandably proud of the 75% take up of extra-curricular activities. The school excels in competitive sports. Displays in classes and around the school are generally of a high standard. Working walls for English and maths are mostly used very effectively to demonstrate the learning journey and plot progress.
- The upper school in the federation is a teaching school. In line with this the continuing professional development (CPD) programme for the school is extensive, particularly for TAs. CPD is closely linked to the school appraisal system.
- The care and wellbeing of the pupils are a particular strength of the school.
- The governing body is rated as outstanding. They have been awarded the National Governor Mark.
- Parents interviewed expressed great satisfaction for the work of the school. They felt very well informed and agreed that all issues were dealt with extremely professionally and with care and understanding. They were pleased with the variety and frequency of community events including the 'come dine with me' for cross-schools interface. Parents are informed regularly of their child's progress and the school makes every effort to sustain regular contact. This includes 'texting group calls'.
- Homework is consistently applied and pupils report that teachers support their efforts.
- Transition arrangements for pupils and school partnerships are considered to be a strength of the school.
- The school has achieved numerous sports awards, the Silver Sports Kite Mark, Healthy Schools status, Eco School silver award, the International Schools Award and National Governors Mark and FMSIS (Financial Management Award)
- Attendance is above national averages

The Headteacher has driven significant school improvements with the support of a highly professional and enthusiastic team. She explained that when she arrived in post the school just needed more "love and self-belief". In my view the pupils of St Gregory's have received those in full measure.

Thank you for an interesting inspiring day.

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