Mike Donovan Achievement for All mark (June 19) Commentary

Your leadership and management of the school and the AfA programme exemplify how to put a school on the path to improvement; you identified what you could turn around quickly and built on those successes to encourage staff and ready them for the 'drip feed' towards future actions. I was especially impressed by the way you have embedded the school values in all the school seeks to do and stripped out what wasn't working. You have encouraged, supported and built staff confidence at the same time as raising aspirations and setting high expectations. You encouraged staff to find a voice and contribute to identifying what wasn't working and finding and exploring alternatives and replacements; never forgetting the necessary development and preparation to ensure their deployment was going to be successful. As well as assessing the effectiveness and impact of classroom methodologies and materials you identified pupil and staff wellbeing as an issue and employed external support to train, model and coach thus ensuring staff could utilize techniques and strategies to aid and support your pupils.

St Mary's has really raised the importance of charitable work and fund-raising to another level; using it as: a source of motivation, promoting outward facing sensibilities and developing entrepreneurial and creative activities that help develop the skills pupils need to flourish both now and in their future lives. Creativity is a very important factor within the school...both within the taught curriculum and as a key part of the wide range of clubs and activities the school offers. There are also a number of opportunities for pupils to develop leadership and team responsibility skills that build as pupils progress up the school. Staff have recognised that pupil responsibilities have to be relevant and real so 'talking shops' have been replaced with fora that have genuine purpose and expected outcomes. The same has been applied to Governors; the introduction of 'Governor in School Days' has raised the profile of Governors and increased their knowledge & understanding of school issues and priorities, it has also taken away their anonymity and given both Governors and staff the sense that responsibilities and accountabilities are joint.

In and outside of class, pupils are supported and nurtured through their issue solving and their learning to: link ideas & concepts and explore alternative working methods & possible solutions in order to encourage open minds and investigative approaches that will help them grow their independence. Staff are encouraged to discuss current and future topics with their pupils who then go on to help shape their own learning. Carefully constructed professional development and getting a consensus around the common approaches to be employed to help pupils become successful: independent, peer and team leaders speaks volumes for the engagement and dedication of the staff and their determination to produce well rounded individuals demonstrating resilience and striving. The example from the drive to improve girls' Maths is typical of the approach the school takes with both staff and fellow pupils being used to pre-introduce concepts and topics.

The school has put an awful lot of effort into developing approaches and systems that enable parents/carers to move along the continuum of: knowing about, to understanding, to involvement in, to engagement with their child's learning. St Mary's has examined its communications with parents/carers and developed a number of strategies and approaches to make improvements. The use of technology to spotlight class and individual activities via an app and/or the web has been particularly welcomed by parents/carers giving them the confidence to ask questions and seek advice about how they might support their child's learning. The school has also employed 'Structured Conversations' to spend more time listening to parents'/carers' concerns, hopes and ambitions for their children. These approaches, plus 'meet, greet and farewell' availability (pre and end of school) added to a raft of information and celebratory events have all contributed to the development of genuine partnership working: with the school encouraging parents/carers to learn and develop as parents and adults; helping them to improve their qualifications & develop at work and parents seeking out advice and guidance from a range of school staff about how to get help and the agencies & organisations they might contact to find assistance.