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26 November 2010

Mr James Devine
Executive headteacher
St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School
Church Lane
Wolstanton
Newcastle
ST5 0EF

Dear Mr Devine

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Anthony Pearson, additional inspector, to your school on 23 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Progress since subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the diocese of Birmingham, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on Tuesday 23 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at teaching in every class. Joint lesson observations were undertaken with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other members of the leadership team, representatives from the governing body and officers from the local authority. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils and parents.

Context

There have been significant changes to staffing since the last monitoring visit. Staff who were on permanent supply left at the end of the summer term. The substantive headteacher left the school in July 2010 to take up a post in another school. The headteacher from Our Lady and St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School has been appointed as executive headteacher on a collaborative basis for three days a week with the deputy headteacher of St Wulstan's acting as headteacher for the other two days. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed after the last monitoring visit.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils are making satisfactory progress in lessons and over time, although this has not been good enough to enable all of them to reach the levels they were predicted to reach or the levels which they are capable of achieving. Teachers make it clear to pupils what they are going to learn and explain to them how their success will be measured. They use assessment information with increasing effectiveness to plan lessons that provide work that meets the needs of pupils of different abilities. The challenge for higher ability pupils has increased as a result of teachers raising expectations and adapting planned work in lessons more precisely to match pupils' needs. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and that they are learning a lot more than they used to. They also say that they are more interested in their work and in the activities, a result of noticeably improved lesson planning and teaching. Teachers' marking of pupils' work helps to explain what they must do to reach their next level. Staff are now much more focused on school improvement and are committed to raising pupils' achievement and rates of progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. Stronger assessment procedures and consultation with pupils has enabled staff to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Target setting is more refined and there is closer monitoring to identify trends in attainment of groups of pupils and those individuals who are underperforming. These practices are becoming better embedded.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour remains good across the school. There is a very positive climate for learning across the school with virtually no disruptions in lessons. Pupils work purposefully, on their own and with other pupils. They attribute improved behaviour to clearer expectations and firm guidance. They eagerly take responsibilities that support not only the teachers but also other pupils. Many pupils are now managing their own behaviour during playtimes and lunch times well.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is becoming more consistent across the school and inadequate teaching has virtually been eradicated. Good practice is more evident in lessons and is particularly evident in literacy where pupils are making good progress. This is due in part to the senior leadership team and subject leaders working together with the literacy consultant. Where pupils have not made the expected progress it has been due to staffing instability. This has caused some loss of momentum in pupils' learning and many have found it challenging to adapt to different teaching styles. However, support for staff by the leadership team has been effective and this has minimised some of the disruptions. This has also ensured that work continues to be matched to pupils' individual needs and that there is more consistency within lessons across each year group. The quality of activities has improved overall, although just occasionally these have not been considered well enough by teachers in order to meet the learning objective. At times, tasks are too ambitious or still not challenging pupils enough. Lesson beginnings and endings sometimes require pupils to think about too many things at once and the focus of what they need to learn and what has been learnt is lost. Staff are becoming self critical and reflective practitioners. They are beginning to regularly evaluate lessons and what pupils' learn more consistently. Pupils' work is celebrated and pupils in turn are taking much greater pride in their work, although some inconsistencies remain. The marking of pupils' work makes greater reference to their targets and mostly provides developmental commentary. However, teachers do not consistently follow this up and pupils are not always given sufficient opportunity to respond to these comments.

The school continues to monitor practice across the school closely. Assessment to support learning is much more reliable and systems are becoming embedded. Pupils contribute through self and peer assessment. Staff are beginning to use the data as well as their own monitoring of pupils progress more effectively to influence the target setting. All pupils have targets and are clear what they need to do to achieve them. These are regularly visited by both pupils and staff. Parents also commented on being kept well informed about the progress their child is making; they particularly enjoy attending the achievement assembly.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The strength of the leadership provided by the executive headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher and the governing body, is a key element in the school's improvement since the last monitoring visit. The changes to the structure of the leadership team have been beneficial in distributing the workload more evenly and providing mutual support. The leadership team has set a clear direction for the school that now focuses on improvements to achievement and teaching. Teamwork is developing and coordinators are beginning to know and lead their subjects with growing confidence. They are becoming confident in holding staff to account for pupils' progress. The senior leadership team has refined the systems for tracking pupils' progress so that they can determine the progress being made by different groups and to inform the range of intervention strategies provided. They are now more systematic in following up any weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment swiftly as and when it arises. Senior leaders have refined their strategic planning although in some areas specific, quantifiable and timed targets are not in place to measure progress and report on it accurately.

There is a determination to bring about change. Monitoring and evaluation has taken place in literacy and numeracy through scrutiny of planning and pupils' work and discussions with pupils. Monitoring in lessons now includes teaching and learning and systems are more secure. Observations made by the senior leadership team and the local authority are accurate. Staff have responded well to areas for improvement. They remain focused on developing robust assessment procedures and the effective use of assessment information to improve teaching and learning. There has been significant staff development in this area and both internal and external moderation ensure that assessments are accurate and reliable. The executive headteacher is well informed of the school's strengths and areas for further development. The governing body is provided with regular and accurate information about the school's progress. Its members are actively involved in monitoring this and, consequently, governance continues to go from strength to strength through this greater knowledge and involvement. The school's procedures and recording for safeguarding pupils is robust and in line with current government regulations. Staff and governors' awareness on this continues to be raised through ongoing relevant professional development activities.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements – good.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The school continues to benefit from the support given by the local authority. The support for literacy has been particularly effective. This is contributing to improved teaching and progress made by pupils. The local authority and the school have revised their action plans to ensure that these are now much more focused and aligned with the school improvement plan. The school and local authority agree that this support will reduce as the school continues to build its own capacity for continued improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Sustain the improvements in teaching and learning to ensure that they are consistently good and increasingly outstanding.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009 asked the school to do the following.

- Ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements by:
 - updating the school's single central record in line with government requirements and providing all adults with the required training
 - providing adequate supervision of pupils before and after school
 - carrying out regular and robust risk assessments and updating them in a timely manner
 - managing pupils' behaviour consistently and fairly, recording any incidents accurately.

- To improve the quality of teaching across the school, teachers should:
 - make very clear to pupils what they are going to learn and explain to them how their success will be measured
 - ensure that lesson planning makes effective use of assessment information to enable them to plan lessons that provide work at the right level for children of all abilities
 - ensure that when they mark pupils' work, teachers explain what pupils must improve in order to reach the next level
 - set clear expectations and guidance for what the school wants to see in lessons and establish robust systems to check that all staff follow it, particularly in managing pupils' behaviour.

- To improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement, leaders and managers should:
 - set a clear direction for the school that focuses on improvements to achievement and quality of teaching by strengthening the role of all leaders and holding all staff accountable for pupils' progress
 - further refine the tracking of pupils' progress to determine the progress made by different groups and inform intervention
 - be more systematic in following up weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment within challenging timescales
 - in all strategic planning, add specific, quantifiable and timed targets, so that progress towards them is measurable and can be reported accurately.