

Suite 22 West Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 01695 566932
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 01695 729320
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** hcarnall@cftb.com

01 October 2010

Mr John Myers/Ms Sue Blair
Acting Headteachers
St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery
Victoria Road
Botcherby
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA1 2UE

Dear Mr Myers and Ms Blair

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 September 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being 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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally. In particular, the school should:
 - raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that work is matched more closely to pupils' learning needs, so that all pupils make progress in every lesson
 - improve the management of pupils' behaviour in lessons
 - improve the clarity of teachers' explanations of new work and of the tasks set for pupils
 - ensure that marking leads to improvements in pupils' work.
- Improve the standard of pupils' behaviour so that it does not hinder learning.
- Strengthen leadership so the school develops the capacity for sustained improvement.
- Ensure that pupils are taught age-appropriate basic skills progressively, especially in English and mathematics.
- Further improve pupils' attendance by ensuring that all possible measures to do so are robustly deployed.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic School and Nursery

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 September 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with groups of pupils, the interim headteachers, subject leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and the local authority School Improvement Partner.

Context

The headteacher left the school in April and the local authority acted swiftly to secure interim arrangements. Two headteachers are currently co-leading improvements, each working three days a week at the school, until the end of December. Three members of teaching staff have also left and new staff have been appointed to Year 6, the Reception class and the special needs coordinator role. An additional appointment has been made to a learning mentor post. One teacher is currently absent and a short-term supply teacher was covering the Year 1 class at the time of this visit.

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

Pupils' achievement has been below average for a number of years. Children enter the Nursery class with knowledge and skills that are well below those expected for their age. Children make good progress in some areas of learning across the Early Years Foundation Stage, but their language and literacy skills are still very low when they enter Key Stage 1. In the latest end of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2010, pupils attained well-below average levels in reading and writing. Their attainment in mathematics was closer to age-related expectations but very few attained at higher levels. Key Stage 2 results in standardised tests were very low. Only 25% of pupils attained the expected Level 4 in both English and mathematics.

Observations and school data indicate that pupils are still working below age-related expectations in all year groups because of previously inadequate teaching and gaps in learning. Pupils' writing skills are underdeveloped across the whole school because literacy skills have not been well taught. However, the quality and accuracy of assessment has improved in the last few months so that teaching is now more closely matched to pupils' learning needs. Teachers have worked hard to make lessons more interesting and ensure pupils understand intended learning outcomes and the purpose of activities. Pupils have responded well; their increased enjoyment and will to succeed is evident in the majority of lessons. Consequently, pupils are now making better progress in their learning. Good teaching in Year 6 is helping pupils to make accelerated progress in this class.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally – **satisfactory**

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Improving the culture of the school has been a key focus for school leaders. They have successfully transformed the environment so that it is more conducive to learning, fully focused on pupils' achievement and sets clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils' increasingly positive attitudes and enjoyment of school are evident in the improving rates of attendance and a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Pupils know and respect the revised behaviour code. Year 6 pupils told the inspector that behaviour has greatly improved and they feel that any incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are dealt with effectively. They feel safe in school and able to take their concerns to adults. Pupils are keen to contribute toward the running of the school, for example, as playground buddies and through the school council. They feel that most pupils would welcome opportunities to take more responsibility and contribute their ideas.

All staff are playing their part in sustaining the improvements in attendance and behaviour. Teachers are aware that the key to improving behaviour is to provide interesting activities that motivate pupils to do their best. Behaviour in the lessons observed was mostly satisfactory. Where there was some disruptive behaviour, it was managed discreetly to prevent it hindering learning of others in the class. The learning mentor is providing effective support to pupils with challenging behaviour or low self-esteem. She is developing relationships with parents and her work with families to follow-up absences and issues with punctuality is having a positive impact.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the standard of pupils' behaviour so that it does not hinder learning – **satisfactory**
- Further improve pupils' attendance by ensuring that all possible measures to do so are robustly deployed – **satisfactory**

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. New appointments, together with a reorganisation of staff and classes, have invigorated teaching across the school. The main drive to date has been on stabilising behaviour

and establishing accurate assessments of pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers now have a more consistent approach to managing behaviour in lessons, which is understood and generally upheld by pupils. School leaders have established more robust pupil progress tracking systems based on accurate and moderated assessments. Regular progress meetings with the headteacher support teachers in assessing pupils' learning, planning the next steps and providing additional support where needed. Teachers show a high level of commitment to improving their practice and raising achievement. Good quality professional development and links with other schools are supporting them in developing their skills and subject knowledge.

In the most effective lessons, new concepts and activities are clearly explained and based on good subject knowledge. Good teaching in Year 6 is helping pupils fill gaps in their learning. However, there are still weaknesses in teaching, including the teaching of language, writing and literacy skills across the whole school. Less effective lessons tend to be characterised by bland tasks that do not challenge pupils' thinking or fully engage their interest. In some instances, the teachers' explanation still lacks clarity and leaves pupils confused.

The teaching of basic skills is improving as assessment is becoming more accurate and next steps in learning are better understood. However, pupils are still working below age-appropriate levels in most classes. Revisions to the curriculum have made clear the expected progression in basic skills from year to year and the themed approach provides increased opportunity for pupils to reinforce and develop their skills in different contexts. These revisions are very recent and are not yet fully implemented across the school.

Progress since the last section 5 on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress, raise attainment and narrow the gap between standards achieved at this school and those seen nationally. In particular, the school should:
 - raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that work is matched more closely to pupils' learning needs, so that all pupils make progress in every lesson
 - improve the management of pupils' behaviour in lessons
 - improve the clarity of teachers' explanations of new work and of the tasks set for pupils
 - ensure that marking leads to improvements in pupils' work.**– satisfactory**

- Ensure that pupils are taught age-appropriate basic skills progressively, especially in English and mathematics – **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The local authority has acted swiftly to put interim leadership arrangements in place. The interim headteachers have established good quality plans and strong foundations on which to build further improvements. The positive impact of their combined leadership is evident in improvements to teaching, the much-improved learning environment and behaviour of pupils, high staff morale and the whole-school commitment to bring about further improvements.

Staff and governors are fully aware of the challenges they face and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses underpinned by accurate self-evaluation and monitoring. Governors are fully focused on improvement and have strengthened their leadership through additional appointments and training. Subject leaders have been empowered to develop their role and are receiving support to develop leadership skills. They show a strong determination to improve the school and the quality of subject monitoring and action planning has improved.

Despite these strengths, the school has not been able to develop its own capacity fully to sustain improvement and is reliant on external support. Leadership roles in the school have been underdeveloped in the past. Governors have not been able to appoint a substantive headteacher, due to a lack of applicants. The local authority has brokered further support from two headteachers in the area who will take over the running of the school for an indefinite period from December onwards. This is necessary because the school does not have appropriately experienced leaders to cover the required responsibilities.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen leadership so the school develops the capacity for sustained improvement – **inadequate**

External support

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose; actions are timely and supportive. Consultant support has been effectively targeted on developing teachers' skills and professional knowledge. Support for leadership from the local authority and School Improvement Partner has been appropriate. They have ensured interim leadership arrangements are in place until more permanent arrangements can be made.