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23 April 2012

Mrs Deborah Connell
Headteacher
St Joseph's Stockport Catholic Primary School
Etchells Street
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Stockport
Cheshire
SK1 1EF

Dear Mrs Connell

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

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 April 2012, 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 December 2011. 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 – inadequate

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, the Director of Children's Services for Stockport and the Diocese of Shrewsbury.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2011

- With immediate effect, take steps to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures by:
 - setting up systems and procedures, with clear lines of accountability, to ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils
 - establishing clear management responsibilities and record-keeping in relation to all aspects of safeguarding
 - establishing systems to monitor regularly the effectiveness of safeguarding.

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion that is good or better
 - ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge to assess pupils' learning accurately
 - ensuring that teachers' marking supports pupils to make progress in line with their starting points and helps them to improve their work
 - providing an appropriate curriculum, with opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills across a range of subjects
 - providing pupils with the opportunity to develop their skills and ensure progression in their learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing systems and procedures to assess the effectiveness of actions taken to improve the impact of teaching on pupils' learning
 - involving all stakeholders in more effective action-planning
 - empowering middle leaders to take responsibility for improving outcomes
 - improving the analysis and monitoring of achievement for all groups of pupils.

- Increase the effectiveness of the governing body by:
 - ensuring that statutory responsibilities are met for safeguarding
 - improving procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's actions, in order to secure improvement and hold leaders fully to account for the school's performance.

- Reduce the level of pupils' absence by continuing to promote vigorously the benefits of regular attendance to pupils and their parents and carers.

Special measures: monitoring of St Joseph's Stockport Catholic Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 April 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work including parts of nine lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff and representatives from the local authority. A telephone discussion was held with the Chair of the Governing Body and informal conversations were held with pupils.

Context

A new Chair and two additional governors with pertinent expertise have been appointed by the governing body. A link has been formed with a local outstanding school whose headteacher and staff are providing support to St Joseph's.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's latest evaluation of attainment has to be treated with some caution since assessment is not fully secure. It indicates that performance continues to be strongest in reading with pupils, overall, reaching the level expected for their age. Attainment in writing is below age-related expectations. The picture is more variable in mathematics with some cohorts performing above the expected level and others below this benchmark. A more refined system for evaluating and tracking the progress of individuals and groups is being developed. However, currently the data are unreliable and this is hampering the school's efforts to use assessment information strategically. The method of setting pupils' attainment targets is insufficiently challenging. The use of curriculum targets to support pupils' learning and progress is inconsistent because the school does not have an agreed system for this. Pupils likely to benefit from a programme of additional support were identified last term and initial evaluations show that these interventions are having a positive impact.

Although pupils display positive attitudes to learning, their progress has not accelerated. In lessons they are attentive and work well together. For example, in a Year 5/6 science lesson, pupils collaborated effectively to work out the forces acting on magnets, parachutes and marbles. Pupils follow instructions promptly and are, in the main, keen to answer questions. They show pride in their work, trying their best to present it well.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics – inadequate

The quality of teaching

Whole-school initiatives to improve teaching are getting underway. With the support of the local authority, a baseline for the quality of teaching was established last term. Lack of clarity about exactly what pupils are to learn each lesson, rather than the tasks they are to complete, was identified as an area of significant weakness. This was borne out by lesson observations during this inspection. Drawing on successful practice at its partner school, a new lesson planning format is being trialled this term to support a sharper focus on learning objectives and success criteria at three levels. At this early stage, staff are not secure in using this or in setting graduated objectives and further training is required. Consequently, improvements to the quality of teaching are limited.

A new marking policy was introduced last term with an increased focus on ensuring that pupils know how they can improve their work. In some classes, pupils are given time to respond to teachers' marking. However, a scrutiny conducted by the school at the end of last term shows that the new policy is not being implemented consistently across all classes.

During this inspection, good relationships and positive attitudes to learning characterised all the lessons observed. In the better lessons teachers' good subject knowledge and energetic approach helped to capture pupils' interest. Suitable resources supported learning effectively and questioning was matched to the stages of individual pupil's learning. Pupils were given time to consider their answers and respond in full sentences. Quick review techniques, such as thumbs up, were used effectively to gauge pupils' confidence in their learning. Where lessons were less successful the pace was slow, instructions lacked clarity, and opportunities were missed to support pupils' learning through practical, concrete activities. Very restricted space hampers the teaching of one class.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion that is good or better – inadequate

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A methodical and incremental approach to improving attendance and punctuality has been adopted and is paying dividends. The profile of these areas has been raised through the introduction of a range of rewards for pupils. They are enthusiastic about the certificates awarded to individuals and classes on a weekly and half-termly basis. The promise of afternoon tea with the headteacher, as well as store vouchers, for those with 100% attendance at the end of the year are popular incentives. Regular features in the school's newsletters remind families of the importance of good attendance and the negative impact of absence on children's learning. Attendance rose last term and the number of pupils who were persistently absent decreased. Systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality are implemented efficiently, with written reminders to the families of those who are frequently absent or late. The school has worked effectively to support a number of families in reducing lateness. Consequently, punctuality has improved, with pupils and their parents

and carers responding positively to campaigns such as 'beat the bell'. The school has been well supported by the local authority in implementing effective strategies both for raising attendance and reducing lateness.

Overall, pupils are polite and courteous to adults and treat one another with respect. In class, they follow instructions promptly and collaborate well when working in pairs or groups. There are a small number of pupils whose behaviour is challenging at times and who have been excluded for fixed periods as a consequence. The careful management of lunchtime for these pupils is helping to reduce incidents of poor behaviour and secure a calm start to afternoon sessions.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Reduce the level of pupils' absence by continuing to promote vigorously the benefits of regular attendance to pupils and their parents and carers – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The local authority's action plan provides the framework and targets for the school's improvement. Within this, the school is working from short-term action plans. The school's action lists reflect a variety of external support but do not marshal activity strategically enough to maximise the benefits of, for example, observations of good practice. The impact of activities, such as training for individual members of staff, is dissipated through lack of clear focus on the current stages of improvement. Targets are not broken down into appropriate stages, making it difficult for the school to evaluate its short-term progress. These weaknesses in planning are hindering the school's development of its capacity to drive improvement.

Some sensible changes have been made to the leadership team, with increased clarity about roles and responsibilities. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have had some opportunities to work together, enabling a more cohesive approach to monitoring to begin to emerge. However, the school has not established agreed pro formas for monitoring areas such as pupils' work, making it difficult to compare developments over time and so embed a consistent approach to evaluation.

The local authority has provided a wealth of expert support to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are secure. Policies and staff training have been reviewed and updated. The headteacher gathered pupils' views about how safe they feel and these have informed some changes. Additional fencing has been erected, clarity about the locking of gates established and clear signage provided for visitors so that access to the site is controlled appropriately. More frequent fire drills have been held, successfully testing out the new arrangements. Closed-circuit television is used effectively to monitor the site. The local authority has drawn up a schedule for checking the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures, focusing on the impact of these on pupils' safety. This provides a helpful model for the school as it begins to establish the regular monitoring of all aspects of keeping pupils safe.

As scheduled in the local authority's plan, work to develop the curriculum is at an early stage. With the support of the local authority some basic changes to timetabling have been made so that all classes are now taught for at least the minimum time required. In order to provide a more coherent approach to learning, a project-based approach to the delivery of history, geography, art and design and technology has been trialled. Initial responses from pupils are positive: they enjoy the opportunities for sustained work on tasks.

The new Chair of the Governing Body is providing a strong lead in the development of effective governance. As a consequence of training and a review of the remits of sub-committees, governors are clearer about their responsibilities and keen to fulfil these. In order to keep abreast of developments, a committee with the specific remit of tracking the school's progress on its areas for improvement has been established. It will report to the full governing body which has decided to meet more frequently both for this purpose and to increase its expertise.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management – inadequate
- Increase the effectiveness of the governing body – satisfactory
- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures – satisfactory
- Provide an appropriate curriculum with opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills across a range of subjects – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action and action plan are fit for purpose and providing suitable strategic direction for the school's improvement. The local authority brokered appropriate school-to-school support which staff at all levels say is very valuable. A very considerable amount of support across all areas is being provided directly by the local authority. A consultant is working with the headteacher one day per week, enabling a detailed diagnosis of the extent of improvement required. Overall, the impact of the support provided is satisfactory. However, there has been marked progress in areas such as safeguarding, raising attendance and improving punctuality.