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25 January 2013

Mr Dominic Mulcahy
Headteacher
St Joseph's Stockport Catholic Primary School
Etchells Street
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Stockport
Cheshire
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Dear Mr Mulcahy

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

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 January 2013, 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 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers should 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 Corporate Director, Services to People for Stockport.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



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 third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 January 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work including parts of 10 lessons, some of which were observed jointly with the headteacher. She also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, the special educational needs coordinator, the school council, the Chair of the Governing Body, the governor with responsibility for special educational needs and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's circumstances since the previous monitoring inspection. However, staffing has been affected by the long-term sickness absence of two teaching assistants.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Across the school, the rate of pupils' progress is accelerating. Pupils are making at least the expected rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics and in most classes progress is more rapid than this. Consequently, pupils' attainment is rising so that in almost all classes their performance is in line with that expected for their age. This is the result of better teaching and a sharper focus on how well pupils should be doing. Realistic targets have been set and, in some instances, revised upwards in the light of pupils' improved progress. Pupils are increasingly aware of the levels they are aiming to reach and the steps they need to take to achieve these.

The school is much better placed to evaluate pupils' achievement because a manageable system for assessing and tracking their progress has been established with the help of the of St Joseph's partner school. The school recognises that further refinement will help analyses to be more specific. Moderation indicates that assessments are accurate so that the school is able to identify those pupils who need more help with their learning. Through regular, better-informed meetings about pupils' progress, leaders are working with teachers to identify the most appropriate support to boost progress for these pupils. This development complements the work of the recently appointed special educational needs coordinator. In a short period, she has conducted a thorough review of provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, liaising with external agencies when appropriate, and put in place clear plans for supporting these pupils.

Assessments of learning for children in the Reception class are detailed and secure, for instance, with regard to their phonic knowledge (knowledge of the sounds letters make).

Regular adult-led sessions target areas where learning is slower and also provide support for those children whose social and emotional development is less advanced.

A more creative approach to the curriculum, which makes relevant connections between subjects, is capturing pupils' interest and this is helping to increase their progress. Links between subjects, and more opportunities to practise a range of skills in varying contexts, are enlivening learning. For example, the great fire of London provided a stimulating event about which Year 2 wrote lively diary entries, making good progress in their understanding of this genre. Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is fostered very effectively by the wide range of visits and visitors who are bringing learning to life. During this inspection, pupils in the Year 5/6 class found science exciting because they had the opportunity to stargaze in a portable planetarium inflated in the school's hall. Additionally, extra opportunities to boost pupils' learning are provided regularly through, for instance, the 'maths club.'

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

- raise attainment in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. The impact of much training last term is evident in better classroom practice. An agreed lesson-planning format is being used consistently; this is helping teachers to focus on the key questions for each session. Generally, lessons are moving at a brisker pace and there is a closer match between the activities set and pupils' learning needs. The level of challenge has risen, both through the tasks set and through much more open-ended questioning. For example, in a Year 4/5 class science lesson, pupils were encouraged to put forward their hypotheses about variations in temperature readings in their classroom overnight and then conduct investigations to help evaluate their ideas. Where teaching is less effective, the link between the learning objective and the tasks set is not strong enough. Class management is weaker so lessons are slow paced and practical activities are not organised well enough.

The deployment of teaching assistants has been reviewed so that their support is more closely targeted where it is most needed. Teaching assistants are better briefed about lessons and, consequently, are making an increasingly valuable contribution to pupils' learning.

The school's monitoring indicates that the marking policy is being implemented consistently. Teachers frequently give pupils pointers on how to improve their work and in some classes pupils are given time to respond to marking. In most lessons, pupils have the opportunity to indicate how confident they are about their learning. They evidently feel secure to say when they need more help. Increasingly, pupils are evaluating their own and one another's work against a list of criteria, helping them to grasp what is required to succeed.

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

- eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion that is good or better – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There has been a marked improvement in the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a much greater emphasis on recognising and rewarding success, which pupils say they appreciate. They are proud to be selected to wear the class 'golden jumper' for a week and have their name displayed on the achievement tree. The introduction of a house system is helping to foster a sense of shared endeavour. Visits, such as the day retreat for pupils in Years 5 and 6, and visitors, including those from a local premier football club, are helping to broaden pupils' horizons and increase their confidence. The reinvigorated school council is certain that its requests are taken seriously. The positive impact of this range of steps to improve the school's ethos is clear in much improved punctuality and attendance, which is now above average.

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

- reduce the level of pupils' absence by continuing to promote vigorously the benefits of regular attendance to pupils and their parents – good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has rapidly gained the commitment of the staff to this. He is well supported by the deputy headteacher and together they are leading from the front, providing good role models for staff. Consequently, staff morale has risen.

With significant, regular support from their partner school, senior leaders are developing key systems to support the school's improvement in the long term. As well as establishing a tracking system, a methodical approach to monitoring and evaluating the school's performance is being introduced. Regular checking is helping to embed training, support better practice and give senior leaders a clear picture of the school's progress. Effective safeguarding practices are embedded in the school's routines.

The school acknowledges that there is more to do to develop middle leadership fully. The appointment of a special educational needs coordinator is a substantial step forward and has resulted in a marked improvement in the school's provision in this area. A consistent approach to subject leadership is being introduced in stages.

Parents spoken to in the playground were unanimous in their view that the school is improving. They welcome the school's open door policy and value the headteacher's presence in the playground at the beginning and end of each day. A growing number of parent volunteers are helping in the school in various ways. The introduction of a termly school magazine is aimed at celebrating pupils' successes and keeping families informed about the life of the school.

High levels of attendance at meetings and training events are testament to governors' commitment to the school. The governing body is developing a suitable range of methods for checking on the school's performance. For instance, governors have looked at pupils' work as well as agreeing a policy for getting the best out of visits to the school. A governor with responsibility for special educational needs has been appointed and attended training. She has worked with the special educational needs coordinator to gain an overview of this area of the school's work and reported back to the governing body. Helpfully, consideration is being given to ensuring that the governing body can sustain its strength in the long term.

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

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management – good
- increase the effectiveness of the governing body – good
- improve the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures – good
- provide an appropriate curriculum with opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills across a range of subjects – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a good level of challenge to the school's leaders, rightly focused on ensuring that improvements are embedded and sustainable. Robust regular reviews provide clear pointers for the next steps on the improvement journey. The considerable support of advisers and consultants is valued by the school. The National Leader in Education and her staff are making a substantial, in-depth contribution through their support for the development of the school's self-evaluation systems, leadership and the curriculum.