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22 March 2013

Mrs Anne Bleasdale
Associate Headteacher
St Catherine's RC Primary School
Moss Lane
Leyland
Lancashire
PR25 4SJ

Dear Mrs Bleasdale

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Catherine's RC Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Mawer, Additional Inspector to your school on 20 and 21 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress across subjects, especially boys and the more-able pupils, by:
 - raising expectations of pupils' achievement and providing further challenge and aspiration for pupils to reach the highest levels of work
 - matching work more closely to the interests and abilities of all pupils
 - providing specific training to enable teachers to set challenging targets and accelerate pupils' progress
 - deploying support assistants more effectively.
- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress by:
 - setting challenging targets that accurately reflect pupils' starting points in Year 1 and reviewing these each half term
 - ensuring that the curriculum is broad, balanced and provides an in-depth, continuous coverage of the National Curriculum for Years 1 to 6
 - focusing sharply on pupils' acquisition of knowledge, especially in problem solving and investigational work in mathematics
 - increasing pupils' enjoyment of learning by making lessons interesting and matching work to their abilities.
- Urgently improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring school leaders provide a clear sense of direction that supports and guides staff in making improvements
 - establishing clear and effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance in order to focus on the areas most in need of improvement
 - setting clear, challenging and measurable targets for the management and improvement of teachers' performance
 - strictly implementing and reviewing improvement plans that are closely linked to measurable outcomes for pupils.
- Improve governance by:
 - ensuring the governing body fulfils its responsibilities in relation to staff performance management
 - ensuring that available funds for pupils eligible for pupil premium are allocated to support their achievement.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 March 2013.

Evidence

The inspection team observed the school's work; including watching nine teachers and two teaching assistants teach 12 full lessons and several shorter sessions. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the associate headteacher, the associate deputy headteacher, the associate assistant headteachers, groups of pupils, teachers, a group of teaching assistants, five governors and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in December 2012, the headteacher has retired from the school and the acting headteacher has taken a headship position at another local school. The leadership team now comprises of an associate headteacher who works three days per week and an associate deputy headteacher who acts as headteacher for two days per week. Two associate assistant headteachers are in post: one leads the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and numeracy; and the other leads Key Stage 2 and literacy. There are two teachers on long-term sickness absence. One teacher has returned from sickness absence and has responsibility for the Year 1/2 class and a supply teacher covers the Year 2 class. There are two vacancies on the governing body. Governors are in the process of appointing a headteacher to take up the post from September 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information collected by senior leaders on pupils' achievement shows that there is an uneven picture across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This is directly linked to the quality of teaching pupils receive and the rate at which they are catching up on gaps in previous slower learning. Year 6 pupils are reaching levels of attainment in reading and mathematics which are broadly in line with the national average, with writing below. Progress for this group of pupils is better than expected, over this year, for reading and mathematics but slightly less than expected for writing. However, lesson observations and scrutiny of books for this year group show that pupils are making swift progress in all three subjects as they respond to engaging activities which interest and challenge them. For example, a well planned guided reading session reflected pupils' concentration, perseverance and enjoyment as four different groups either read a novel, edited their work, practised comprehension skills or discussed how to answer questions using the text.

In other classes, the school's information on pupils' progress is less secure. This is due to inaccuracies in earlier checks on pupils' attainment so that the baseline from which progress can be measured does not totally reflect a firm picture of prior achievement. Leaders recognise this and have taken action to rectify the issue to

provide a fixed baseline from which to measure progress in the future. However, lesson observations, a scrutiny of pupils' work, discussion with pupils and teachers reflect a variable picture of progress, although writing is stronger in most classes.

Pupils know their targets for reading, writing and mathematics and most can talk about how to improve their work. There are examples of extremely thorough marking, especially in writing which links with pupils' targets and explicitly guides pupils to improve their work. Similarly, there are examples of teachers giving pupils an opportunity to respond to this marking and, for example, answer questions set by the teacher about the piece of work; pupils very much appreciate these chances to take responsibility for their learning. However, this practice is not reflected across the school or as thoroughly in mathematics.

The variety of subjects pupils study has been reviewed and pupils comment on how they cover 'lots of subjects'. They also comment that lessons are more 'fun and challenging' so they have to work harder. Some links are made between different subjects and planned activities are starting to meet the needs and abilities of all pupils. Problem-solving activities are greeted with enthusiasm by pupils and they thrive on challenging investigations. This was evidenced in a Year 5 lesson on proper and improper fractions during which pupils were made to think and test out their ideas. Boys were particularly engaged in this lesson. However, the development of a long-term curriculum overview which links the development of skills and knowledge to the needs and interests of all pupils is still at an early stage of development. Similarly, the enhancement of the curriculum with after-school activities, visits and visitors is developing.

The quality of teaching

Since Her Majesty's Inspector's last visit there has been a change in the profile of teaching with new teachers in several classes. This has provided much needed stability and staff report that morale is rising as everyone works as a team committed to improving outcomes for pupils. Well received training from local authority consultants for all and individual staff has supported them in improving aspects of practice in the classroom. Guidance on planning lessons, the teaching of writing and assessing pupils' work have all contributed to staff feeling more confident in these aspects of practice. Follow-up support and coaching by school leaders and the development of a suite of policies help to guide staff to improve further. High expectations of staff and pupils are establishing a more consistent approach to teaching. Meetings to check their marking of pupils' work with each other has led to teachers' confidence in awarding a National Curriculum Level to a piece of work. This means that teachers are developing much more understanding of the progress pupils are making and can make, and have the tools to pitch activities at the correct level for all pupils. However, the lack of security in the assessment of pupils' prior learning hinders some teachers' ability to plan activities which exactly match the needs of pupils. Despite this, the overall quality of teaching, although

variable in subjects, is getting better. Classrooms are brighter and there is a more industrious atmosphere as many pupils engage with well planned activities and use the 'working walls' and 'progress prompts' to support independent learning. Features of stronger teaching include well pitched activities, high expectations, skilful use of teaching assistants, use of questions which probe pupils' understanding, good modelling of what pupils are expected to do, and adults moving around the room to challenge or support pupils. In these lessons, pupils make swift progress. However, less effective teaching misses key aspects of practice, such as, explaining exactly what pupils will do and modelling the activity; or using pupils' misunderstandings to generate discussion from all pupils so that all are involved in learning.

The deployment of teaching assistants has been reviewed so that their particular skills have been matched with the needs of groups or individual pupils. They have received training for their roles and comment that 'they get to know what is going on' now. Many work with the teacher to plan lessons so that they can make links in learning for the pupils they support. In some lessons, teaching assistants capably support the learning of groups and individual pupils; but on a few occasions they are not as involved as they could be at the start of lessons in supporting pupils to engage or encourage individual pupils to answer the teachers' questions. It may be appropriate for the school to consider introducing a 'communication sheet' between the teacher and the teaching assistant so that teachers could know more readily how all pupils are performing and can tackle any problems more swiftly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leadership has developed a positive learning atmosphere. Throughout the school much emphasis has been placed on displaying pupils' work and creating areas which invite them to take time and reflect on their lives and those of others in the world. Pupils are polite, articulate, welcoming to visitors and proud of St Catherine's. They are confident to offer their views and have high aspirations for their future. Inspectors observed a variable picture of pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Pupils behave well in many lessons as they are engrossed in interesting activities. In a few lessons, pupils' behaviour interrupts learning as they are not sure what to do or they are not motivated to learn. Pupils feel safe but have variable views about bullying and generally consider there are few, if any, instances; when any do occur the adults help them to sort it out. Senior leaders have consulted with parents, staff, governors and pupils in creating a new behaviour policy which rewards good behaviour but is clear about what action will be taken to tackle inappropriate behaviour; this is intended to be launched shortly. Consequently, pupils are not totally clear about the system for managing behaviour and practice is not consistent across the school. However, in instances where pupils' behaviour is less than the standard expected they generally respond to their teachers' wishes.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim leadership team has speedily set a clear direction for the improvement of the school and have quickly won the trust, respect and commitment from staff. Together with the governing body, they have continued to engage with the local authority in their determination to raise achievement for all groups of pupils. A robust monitoring and evaluating process has been implemented so that leadership recognise the developing strengths of the school and areas which need to be prioritised. This process is run over three weeks and leaders use a range of checking techniques, such as lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, to provide information on improvements. Communication between the two headteachers is effective and their different skills complement each other.

Action plans reflect the most pressing needs for the school to improve and senior leaders are methodically implementing and refining actions which will take the school forward. Actions are grounded on better outcomes for pupils and senior leaders review actions taken on a weekly basis and identify what needs to be done next. Staff comment that they now know what needs to be done and the reason for decisions. They feel the interim leadership is approachable, providing a clear direction and feel supported and challenged to raise achievement. Procedures for checking on pupils' progress are strengthening. Pupils' progress is measured each half term in reading, writing and mathematics and this information is evaluated by senior leaders. As teachers' skills in judging the amount of progress pupils make against the nationally expected progress grow, the system is becoming more secure. As a result, some teachers know the levels at which pupils are working and can give extra help to those pupils who are falling behind.

Middle leaders provide good role models, challenge and support for their phase teams and are instrumental in generating information relating to the quality of teaching so that support can be linked specifically to need. Leaders have been appointed to different subjects and aspects of the school's work and, in the main, have written action plans with a focus on improving pupils' outcomes. However, this role is at an early stage of development as staff are not involved in the monitoring and evaluation of their subjects throughout the school.

Systems for checking on the performance of teachers are in place. Governors have set challenging targets for the associate headteacher and associate deputy headteacher and senior leaders have set targets for the performance of most teachers. Although teachers had been set targets prior to December, the interim leadership, with the support of teachers, reviewed these targets so that they are more closely aligned to the progress of pupils and the improvement of the school. Leadership has conducted meetings with each teaching assistant to discuss their strengths, identify training opportunities and set targets for development. As a result, they feel valued, know why decisions are being taken and understand their roles in accelerating progress for pupils.

Since Her Majesty's Inspector's previous visit, one new governor has been appointed to the governing body, and, although two vacancies remain, action is underway to remedy the situation. All governors are in the process of identifying their skills so that new governors with the appropriate expertise can be appointed. Governors have reflected honestly on their role in the leadership of the school and have created an action plan to guide their work. They have produced a comprehensive monitoring report and evidence shows that they are asking very searching questions of senior leaders to hold them fully accountable. Governors have received training on the use of pupils' achievement information and have more training planned. Individual governors are linked to subjects and aspects. For example, the numeracy governor met with the subject leader and local authority consultant and is supporting a planned evening for parents on mathematics. Governors consider that the information they receive from senior leaders is much better as it relates directly to pupil progress. The Chair of the Standards and Effectiveness Committee visits the school regularly and meets with the headteacher. This provides senior leaders with challenge and support on a weekly basis and a strong link between the day-to-day running of the school and the decisions governors take at meetings. Activities undertaken by governors, such as hearing pupils read, attending assemblies and supporting pupils' 'booster' groups, are raising the profile of governors with staff, pupils and parents. A project on refurbishing and re-stocking the library is providing a focus for joint working. The governing body have released funding to purchase mathematics resources and guided reading books.

Governors have used the Ofsted toolkit to review their effectiveness in evaluating the link between pupil premium funding and the achievement of pupils eligible for this funding. This has resulted in a full, transparent procedure to enable governors to link the funding to the achievement of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.

External support

After the previous inspection the local authority responded swiftly to secure leadership at the school so that pupils' education could be improved. The local authority officer provides governors and senior leaders with support and challenge through the review of the performance of the school at the Standards and Effectiveness Committee. She has worked in partnership with the school to identify what support the local authority could provide to have the most effect on pupils' achievement. For example, teachers received training in how to develop writing and, as a result, the quality of pupils' writing overall is improving. Similarly, training in assessing pupils' progress is leading teachers to be more confident in awarding levels to pupils' work and contributing to a more secure system for tracking pupils' progress.