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14 June 2013

Mrs Margaret Dickinson
Interim Headteacher
St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School
Wexham Road
Slough
SL2 5QR

Dear Margaret

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 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.

This was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection I met with you, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), members of your senior leadership team, a representative of the local authority, a representative of the diocese and the headteacher designate. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan.

Context

Since the last inspection one of the deputy headteachers has left the school. Two teachers have been absent from school for long periods. A permanent headteacher and three assistant headteachers have been appointed to join the school in September. As interim headteacher, you have been in post since before the previous inspection. You will stand down, as planned, in September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

As interim headteacher, you have brought stability to the school following a period of turbulence. Essential systems have been set up and cycles of monitoring and review have become established. The action plans that you and the local authority have produced are rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and building leadership capacity. A good start has been made on these priorities. Leaders at all levels are focused on achieving these shared aims.

Phase leaders have been organised so each has responsibility for teaching and learning across two year groups. These leaders are being given a range of useful training and support by local authority consultants so they are better equipped to plan, implement and evaluate school improvement in their phases. Phase leaders are starting to take responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching. They recognise the need to gather evidence from a range of sources to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching over time. The notes they provide to teachers following observations are not as useful as they could be because they merely point out what actions have or have not been taken rather than evaluating the effectiveness and impact of these actions.

Phase leaders are producing their own actions plans to show how improvements in their phase areas are tied in with the overarching priorities identified in the school's main plan. The actions identified in these plans are sensible, but not focused enough because leaders have not explicitly expressed what the intended actions are meant to improve.

The IEB brings a wealth of experience which it is using well to plan for the future of the school. Board members have sensibly appointed a headteacher for September with a proven track record in school improvement. They have provided appropriate support and challenge to the current interim headteacher. The interim headteacher and the Chair of the IEB have used their combined expertise, both as ex-headteachers of outstanding schools, to support and challenge each other.

The statement of action is fit for purpose. The local authority has seconded experienced and capable people to run the school in the absence of a headteacher and governing body. A local authority consultant works alongside these to monitor their work and to provide challenge and support in the development of leadership. A separate consultant, with no attachment to the school, conducts a termly monitoring visit to ensure that the progress being made is evident to an independent observer.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Slough Local Authority and the Director of Education for Northampton Diocese. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector