

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

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mr Vincent Jones
Headteacher
St Clare's RC Primary School
Victoria Avenue
Manchester
M9 0RR

Dear Mr Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Clare's Roman Catholic Primary School, Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Several classrooms were visited during a tour of the school. The school action plan and current self-evaluation document were evaluated along with a selection of pupils' work books.

Context

There has been a significant number of staff changes since the last inspection. Three teachers have resigned. Appointments have been made to replace these teachers and two experienced teachers will return from extended leave before the end of the summer term. This significant change has the potential to disrupt the school further, considerable thought needs to be given to how new and returning staff will be appropriately supported.

Main findings

Improving teaching is your main priority. You are aware that high quality teaching will have the greatest impact on accelerating pupils' progress. Following the last inspection you have acted swiftly to raise the quality of teaching. Some weaker teachers have left the school, you have appointed new teachers to replace them and you have reorganised staff to strengthen Early Years and Key Stage 1.

You and other leaders have produced an action plan which is accurately matched to what the school needs to do to improve. The plan is comprehensive and gives actions required to ensure improvements in leadership, teaching and learning. However, there is some confusion between what the school will do and how success will be measured. There is a need to identify clearly how practices will be different and how much the attainment and progress of pupils is expected to improve as a result of the changes.

Records of your monitoring and evaluation demonstrate that the quality of teaching has improved since the inspection. Teachers say that the focus on high quality teaching in staff meetings is helping them to apply good practice. This is leading to more pupils than before making good progress in each lesson. A group of Year 5 pupils agreed that teaching is better and they particularly like their Working Wall on which their ideas and examples of outstanding work are displayed. As a result of this improvement, you anticipate that the number of pupils making the progress they are capable of will increase this year.

The emphasis placed on literacy across the school is beginning to have an effect particularly on writing. Training for all staff has led to a well organised and regular read-write session in the infant department, along with increased opportunities for extended writing for older children. Marking by teachers is supporting the progress of pupils who are clear about the levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve. This good practice should now be extended so that pupils are able to improve their literacy and numeracy skills by giving them time to respond to specific comments made by the teacher.

The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of new governors. Governors are now linked to classes so that they can gain first-hand knowledge of how new initiatives impact on the children. Some governors have taken part in training to help them use data more effectively. The governors recognise that this new knowledge needs to be used as a means of holding leaders to account. Governors should ensure they are questioning leaders and the headteacher more rigorously about how well pupils are doing.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Refine the action plan by separating actions to be taken from descriptions of what will be happening differently and by making expected outcomes relate to the attainment and progress of pupils.
- Ensure the governing body is using information about pupil attainment and progress to question and challenge the headteacher and other leaders about the effectiveness of any actions taken by the school.
- Make sure the efforts of teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders impact directly on raising the quality of teaching by ensuring time is not wasted on initiatives which do not improve the attainment and progress of pupils.
- Make plans to support the high number of new and returning staff along with new governors, so that they quickly begin to make a positive impact in the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You are making good use of range of external support. Links with the local authority are good. You have made use of training for governors and support with the monitoring of teaching, as a means of strengthening leadership. Links with a local outstanding primary school are relatively new. However, you and the local authority are confident that this partnership will secure improvements in the quality of teaching. You are making use of a number of external consultants, for example to support with the implementation of read-write sessions for younger children. The impact of these commercial partnerships will need to be very carefully and regularly evaluated so that you are not distracted from your goal of improving the attainment and achievement of all pupils at St Clare's.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Manchester and the Director of Salford Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector