

Serco Inspections
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9162
Direct email: siobhan.garrattley@serco.com

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Mrs Pauline Turner
Headteacher
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School
Grange Road
Northampton
NN3 2AX

Dear Mrs Turner

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

Following my visit with Jonathan Sutcliffe and Stephen Palmer, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 17–18 July 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers other than those already employed may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northampton Local Authority and the Episcopal Vicar of Education for Northampton Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment, particularly in mathematics, improve the quality of teaching and ensure that:
 - staff have high expectations of pupils, particularly the most able
 - teachers use accurate information about pupils' learning to plan precisely for all groups of pupils, so that work is demanding and well matched to pupils' ages and abilities
 - all adults are well briefed and deployed during lessons in order to maximise pupils' learning
 - lessons proceed at a brisk pace so that all pupils are kept engaged throughout
 - teachers monitor and assess pupils' progress carefully throughout lessons, to check that they are able to get on with the work set and to clear up any misunderstandings
 - marking of pupils' work consistently shows pupils clearly what they need to do to improve it
 - pupils have good opportunities to develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across all subjects
 - staff are all skilled in teaching letters and sounds (phonics), in managing pupils' behaviour and using ICT to enable pupils to learn more effectively.

- Develop the capacity for staff with leadership responsibilities to contribute to school improvement by:
 - carrying out a review of their roles and responsibilities
 - providing training to enable them to monitor and evaluate teaching, use information about pupils' learning to evaluate their achievement, contribute to school improvement planning and holding staff to account for their success in promoting pupils' achievement.

- Increase the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that:
 - the governing body has a full complement of well-trained governors, who are skilled in using information about how well pupils learn to hold the school to account
 - governors fulfil all of their duties, particularly in relation to the use of the Pupil Premium funding and the approval of pay increases, based on how well staff meet the targets set for them.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17–18 July 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, governors, pupils, members of the senior leadership team, representatives from the local authority and diocese.

Context

On 1 June, the school became part of a hard federation with three other local Catholic schools. The federation has one governing body and each school has a committee of governors.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There has been insufficient improvement in the rate of progress made by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics because of continuing weaknesses in teaching. This year in reading, progress has been inadequate in most of the classes. In writing and mathematics, it is more variable, but too much of it is inadequate. Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been slow. There has been some improvement in the progress of groups of pupils such as disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals. More are now making the progress they should, but this is still too variable from class to class.

School assessment information shows that, by the end of Key Stage 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics remain broadly average. There has been improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining the higher Level 5 in writing and mathematics. A greater proportion of pupils this year have met the expected reading level in Year 1. However, this proportion is still below average.

In most of the lessons, the teaching requires improvement or is inadequate because groups of pupils such as the more able or the less able make slower progress than they should. This is because teachers plan work that is not pitched at the correct level for them.

In Key Stage 1, pupils who find reading difficult are not helped sufficiently by the daily reading lessons to improve their skills. Those heard reading struggled to recognise the sounds represented by the letters that you would expect them to be able to read.

Pupils have more opportunity to develop their information, communication and technology skills. They were observed using these skills in lessons proficiently.

The quality of teaching

School leaders have not managed to reduce the variability in the quality of teaching sufficiently. Records of the local authority checks on teaching, inspectors' observations of lessons and the work in books show that, over time, only a small proportion is good with too much that remains weak. This includes teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Marking in literacy and mathematics books remains inadequate overall. In mathematics, it is slightly better because teachers try to offer pupils advice on the next steps they need to take to improve their work. However, often these next steps are not appropriate, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the teaching of mathematics. In literacy, in some classes, the marking is of no benefit to the pupils.

Planning remains a weakness. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough when planning work. Expectations are not high enough so that work lacks challenge for some groups. Work in books and lesson observations demonstrate that one reason for this lack of challenge is that often all pupils do the same work regardless of ability. When this occurs, it is too hard for some and too easy for others.

The impact of teaching assistant help in lessons is variable. Often they support the lower ability groups but, in some lessons, even with this additional help, pupils struggle to make good progress.

In lessons where teaching is weak, teachers do not keep a careful check on the progress of some groups of pupils. Pupils spoken to report that the more able rarely get the support needed from the teacher as they are usually left to work on their own.

Staff have had additional training in teaching reading, but this has not had the desired impact on pupils' progress which is too slow.

There is good teaching in some classes in the school, particularly in Years 4, 5, and 6. For example, in a Year 5 literacy lesson where the teaching was good, work was well planned to challenge most of the pupils. Consequently, pupils made good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are very polite and well mannered. It was a pleasure to talk with them about the school. In lessons, nearly all of them try their best even where teaching is weak. They work cooperatively together, demonstrating good teamwork skills.

Occasionally, the behaviour of a few is less good than it should be. This tends to occur when pupils are given work to complete that they find too challenging.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has failed to ensure that the senior leadership team has the necessary skills to check and improve the quality of teaching. They do not take responsibility for the performance management of teaching, and checks on the quality of teaching lack rigour. These are some of the main reasons to explain the lack of progress made by the school. Some less experienced leaders, such as for mathematics, are trying to improve the quality of teaching conscientiously, but they are undermined by a lack of training. Other senior leaders have been in post for a long time and are being paid for roles and responsibilities that they are unable to fulfil.

The school improvement plan is adequate, but leaders have demonstrated that they are unable to carry it out. For example, the leadership of literacy is weak. The action taken to make improvements is insufficiently linked to the priorities in the school improvement plan. It appears that leaders have carried out the activities that they preferred rather than those most needed by the school. Work with one or two teachers has been successful in strengthening their teaching of writing, but this is not the weakest aspect of literacy that needs remedying first. School leaders have been unsuccessful in strengthening reading and marking, which are more urgent priorities.

Some aspects of leadership are more successful. The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is strengthening, as is the religious education. However, as in all aspects of teaching, the quality remains too variable.

Governance prior to federation has been inadequate. Governors have not held the headteacher and other leaders to account with sufficient rigour or urgency. For example, they set the school the deadline to eradicate inadequate marking by April. When this deadline was not met it was moved to a later date.

The school governor committee is made up mainly of the existing school governing body. They are not working together effectively. For example, some governors are aware that they are planning a reorganisation of the staffing structure and others are not. This planned reorganisation does not get to the heart of strengthening school leadership by challenging and eradicating weaknesses. By the time it is planned to take place, in January 2014, governors will have allowed inadequate leadership to continue for over a year since the section 5 inspection.

The overall governance of the federation appears to be a positive step, but it is too early to judge the impact of this. Governors demonstrate that they understand the

challenges they have to overcome to improve the education of the children in their care.

External support

The local authority and diocese have become increasingly concerned by the lack of progress made by the school. Since the beginning of June, they have taken the necessary steps to try to remedy this. However, the impact of the action taken is not apparent, as the school has made too little improvement to teaching and achievement since the section 5 inspection.