

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 566 857
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
jkinsman@cfbt.com



22 November 2013

Mrs Anne O'Brien
Headteacher
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School, Darwen
Limes Avenue
Darwen
Lancashire
BB3 2SG

Dear Mrs O'Brien

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School, Darwen, Blackburn with Darwen

Following my visit to your school on 21 November 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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 additional action to:

- Increase pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics particularly in Reception and Years 1 and 2.
- Increase boys' attainment across the school so that the gap between boys and girls closes.
- Increase the capacity of governors and senior leaders to improve aspects of the school themselves without external support.
- Improve the school's action plan so that it makes very clear how improvements will be measured throughout the year and is easy to follow and evaluate.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and senior leaders. I also met with four representatives from the governing body, the local authority's adviser and the National Leader in Education who is supporting you and your school leaders. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and briefly looked through some records of lesson observations completed by senior leaders.

Main findings

The main reason why the school has made effective improvement since the inspection is because it has been well supported by the local authority, a National Leader of Governance, two advanced-skills teachers and a National Leader in Education from a local school. Although senior leaders have taken effective action against the points for improvement identified in the previous inspection it has not made much progress on its route to be judged as good at the next inspection.

The governing body spent a day with a National Leader of Governance (NLG) who produced a highly critical report on the governance of the school. The criticisms have galvanised governors to act quickly to begin a reconstitution and restructure resulting in an amalgamation of committees and new roles and responsibilities. Governors are due to complete a skills audit, and identify their training needs. Although none of these have taken place yet, they are due to be completed by Christmas. In addition, the local authority is adding expertise to the governing body by appointing two new governors. At the time of my visit, the governors did not yet have access to Raiseonline which is Ofsted's collection of data about the school. It is imperative that governors have this document as soon as possible so that they are able to compare pupils' achievement with national averages and identify trends of improvement or decline. The committees and the full governing body are highly reliant on external advice and support. Rapid improvement is needed if they are to be self-sufficient and fulfil their role effectively in challenging the school to improve to 'good'.

With help from the National Leader in Education, senior leaders have streamlined paperwork and documentation and have introduced improved systems to check on teachers' work. Senior leaders now monitor lessons and pupils' work more frequently. They give clear feedback to teachers about what they have seen and most importantly, they follow this through to check that improvements have quickly been made.

The capacity of the school to improve itself needs to be developed quickly because senior leaders are heavily reliant on external support. The local authority and National Leaders have helped the headteacher to write an action plan for improvement. The plan needs to be refined and improved further so that it is shorter and has clear priorities for improvement. It should also include precise ways of measuring the successful actions taken throughout the year and have a greater focus on the weaknesses identified in the school's data. These weaknesses include: pupils' writing, boys' attainment, standards in Key Stage 1, children's achievement in Reception and pupils' attainment in mathematics. Management team meetings involve almost every teacher in the school and are scheduled for every two or three weeks. To improve further, the headteacher should consider weekly senior leadership meetings to build the school's capacity to improve itself.

Senior leaders, with help from advanced skills teachers and the National Leader in Education, have improved some aspects of teaching. There is a new marking policy in place and senior leaders confirmed teachers now enable pupils to respond to their marking and comments. Sometimes this means pupils correct aspects of their work such as spellings and grammar and sometimes it means they complete a challenge or answer a teacher's comment. Senior leaders have identified improvement in pupils' understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. The teacher responsible for leading English in the school identified some positive gains in pupils' writing. In Reception for example, the old system of concentrating on communication for a term, reading for a term and then writing for a term

has been replaced to make sure children learn all three aspects of English at the same time. As a result Reception children's skills, according to senior leaders, are improving.

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

As described above, much of the improvements to the school since the inspection have been inspired and secured by external support.

Senior leaders identified some improvements to teaching as a result of work with two advanced-skills teachers, for example, instead of dividing every lesson into three distinct parts, teachers are now more flexible and let some higher-ability pupils start work quickly and other pupils stay with the teacher until they fully understand before starting their work. Teachers now plan lessons, according to senior leaders, that are based on the needs of pupils rather than rigidly following a scheme of work. The advanced-skills teachers work at the school led by the National Leader of Education (NLE). The NLE started work with the school approximately a year ago and volunteered to continue working with it. As a result there is a continuity and clarity of message and school's systems, for example tracking pupils' progress, have continued to improve.

In addition to brokering the time from the NLE and the NLG, the local authority has continued to make visits to the school to provide challenge and support to senior leaders. This support has been diluted because of the school's lack of capacity to improve itself. Nevertheless, the school, with support from external partners, has made effective improvement on the recommendations made in the Ofsted report.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen and as below.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority -
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- < Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation