

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

T 0300 123 1231

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

Direct T 01695 566862

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: rcowley@cfbt.com



12 December 2013

Mr Peter Johnson
Headteacher
St Raphael's Catholic Primary School
Huddersfield Road
Millbrook
Stalybridge
Cheshire
SK15 3JL

Dear Mr Johnson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Raphael's Catholic Primary School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 October 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 action to:

- ensure that all staff are effectively using the new marking and planning procedures
- ensure that all staff are challenging the most able pupils in order for them to make the best possible progress
- ensure that the Chair of Governors plays a key role in the Interim Strategic Group and that this group drives forward improvements at a rapid pace across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the deputy head, six members of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and two groups of pupils. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the school.

Context

The current deputy head is leaving at the end of term. Following a thorough recruitment process, an internal candidate has been appointed to take up this position in January. Over recent weeks, she has already taken up senior leadership responsibilities.

Main findings

You and your staff have responded positively to the inspection judgements and it has given you a renewed focus on improvement. Your action plan focuses closely on the areas for improvement which were highlighted in the inspection report. It gives a detailed account of actions and intended impact, but it is not always clear who is responsible for leading, monitoring and evaluating these specific actions.

You have taken swift action to tackle any teaching which is less than good. You are now using a lesson observation form which has a much closer focus on pupil progress and learning. The recent round of joint observations shows an improving picture, with teachers taking more care to ensure that work is matched to pupils' needs. The new deputy head is giving effective personalised support to a member of staff and this is having some impact.

The new policy on learning objectives is helping teachers to plan how to challenge the most able pupils but this is variable across the school. This inconsistency is borne out by the comments of the pupils I spoke to during my visit. While some could give examples of when they had been challenged to move their learning forward, all except one pupil in the Key Stage 2 group said there had been occasions when they had found the work too easy. A Year 1 girl expressed this very clearly saying, 'I'm in the top group and things are easy-peasy.' Several of the pupils said they would welcome more challenge.

There is some evidence that the new marking policy is making a difference, although you know there is still some variability in how staff are using it. However, the pupils I spoke to could all explain how 'fix-it time' was helping them to improve. As a result of our discussions, you are planning to build on this success and use 'fix-it time' more systematically throughout the week.

Pupils could explain how their personal targets and 'steps to success' help them to progress and move on to the next level. One girl in Year 5 said she found this particularly helpful when writing stories. You have taken some actions to raise the

standard of pupils' writing, such as the introduction of 'Big Write Fridays'. Although it is too early to see any sustained impact, I saw some very high quality written work in the books of the more able Key Stage 2 pupils. You are aware that you need to do more on broadening the opportunities for writing across other subjects.

All staff have accepted the rationale of aspirational targets for all pupils. You track pupils' progress against these targets frequently and ensure teacher assessment is accurate through robust moderation procedures. This data is used effectively to identify those pupils who require extra help to make the best possible progress. You have planned a range of monitoring activities throughout the year but doing fewer activities in a more in-depth way would have greater impact. For example, by giving staff quality feedback after doing a book scrutiny.

Governors accept that they did not challenge enough in the past but this is now happening more frequently. They are now asking important questions about quality of teaching and pupil progress. Working in partnership with the local authority, they have set up an Interim Strategic Group to monitor and evaluate the progress being made against the school action plan. This group will be the 'engine room' of governance over the next eighteen months and we discussed the reasons why the Chair of Governors needed to play a key role in its work, which at the time of my visit, was not the case.

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

The local authority has worked closely and effectively with the school since its recent inspection. Representatives from the local authority were involved in the post-inspection meeting with parents which gave a clear message that they would be working in partnership with the school on its journey of improvement. The local authority is also playing an important part in the Interim Strategic Group. Training delivered so far has had an impact on improving the quality of teaching. An example of this is the development of Lead Learners in Year 6, which the pupils themselves say is helping them to become more independent. A programme of joint observations and training for middle leaders is planned for early next term.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector