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12 December 2013

Mrs Barbara Coulton
Acting Headteacher
St Catherine's RC Primary School
Moss Lane
Leyland
Lancashire
PR 25 4SJ

Dear Mrs Coulton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Catherine's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 and 11 December 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.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress across subjects, especially boys and the more able pupils, by:
 - raising expectations of pupils' achievement and providing further challenge and aspiration for pupils to reach the highest levels of work
 - matching work more closely to the interests and abilities of all pupils
 - providing specific training to enable teachers to set challenging targets and accelerate pupils' progress
 - deploying support assistants more effectively.
- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress by:
 - setting challenging targets that accurately reflect pupils' starting points in Year 1 and reviewing these each half term
 - ensuring that the curriculum is broad, balanced and provides an in-depth, continuous coverage of the National Curriculum for Years 1 to 6
 - focusing sharply on pupils' acquisition of knowledge, especially in problem solving and investigational work in mathematics
 - increasing pupils' enjoyment of learning by making lessons interesting and matching work to their abilities.
- Urgently improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring school leaders provide a clear sense of direction that supports and guides staff in making improvements
 - establishing clear and effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance in order to focus on the areas most in need of improvement
 - setting clear, challenging and measurable targets for the management and improvement of teachers' performance
 - strictly implementing and reviewing improvement plans that are closely linked to measurable outcomes for pupils.
- Improve governance by:
 - ensuring the governing body fulfils its responsibilities in relation to staff performance management
 - ensuring that available funds for pupils eligible for pupil premium are allocated to support their achievement.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 December 2013**Evidence**

I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, the new deputy headteacher and the leaders for English and mathematics. I watched seven teachers teach nine lessons and several shorter sessions. I observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including pupil progress information and leadership's check on the quality of teaching. I spoke with groups of pupils, teachers, a small group of parents and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in June 2013, the associate headteacher, associate deputy headteacher and two associate assistant headteachers have returned to their own or different schools. One teacher left the school in July. In September, a new acting headteacher, on a secondment for two years, and a new permanent deputy headteacher joined the school. Three temporary teachers started at the school in September. The governing body has appointed a senior leader to take up appointment in January 2014. On the days of the inspection, one teacher was absent.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Provisional results of the Key Stage 2 national tests were slightly better than the school predicted, with a slight improvement on 2012. Attainment overall was average. Boys did better than girls and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals did better than those not eligible; again an improvement on 2012. The proportions of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in mathematics and reading rose from 2012 and are similar to the national average. Although progress for this group of pupils was swift for their final two terms, overall, from their starting points in Year 3, they made slightly less progress than they should have done.

Results of the 2013 Key Stage 1 national assessments show a fall in overall attainment from 2012, dropping to average in reading, below average in mathematics and significantly below average in writing. No pupils gained the higher Level 3 in writing and few pupils did in mathematics. Pupils in this class were taught by several different teachers over the course of the key stage which led to uneven progress and pupils not doing as well as they could do. However, senior leaders and governors have taken action to guard against this happening again in Year 2. Likewise, they are taking action to ensure that pupils now in Year 3 are making better progress to make up for lost ground. This situation is monitored carefully.

From the school's information on pupils' progress and a scrutiny of a sample of books, pupils are making progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress is swifter in Year 6 especially in writing and mathematics. Throughout the school there are pockets of faster progress because pupils are set work which interests them and matched better to their abilities. Pupils generally feel they are making progress in their learning and enjoy their work. They are proud of their efforts and willingly share their achievements. During a mathematics lesson in Year 2, in which pupils were solving word problems then writing some for each other, a pupil commented 'This is really fun maths'.

Pupils have their targets at the front of their workbooks and these are highlighted and ticked when the target is achieved. In this way, pupils have an understanding of the progress they need to make. Marking using the 'pink' and 'green' approach is used in all classes and in all key stages marking is thorough. For younger pupils marking distinguishes between pupils' independent work and 'teacher-assisted' work so that progress can be plotted carefully. Books of older pupils, especially Year 4, show that much work is set specifically for the different abilities in the class so that pupils are working at the right level from the start of the lesson. There is an opportunity for this to become more widespread across the school. In Years 4, 5 and 6 there are examples of pupils responding to the questions asked by teachers in their marking and pupils say they have a chance to reply. There is scope for this to become more common so that pupils can be further challenged.

Poor presentation, weak handwriting and spelling skills are impeding the progress of some pupils and these need to be remedied quickly. Likewise, pupils would benefit from knowing their 'times tables' so that they have quick recall and are able to solve problems efficiently.

Pupils enjoy their learning in different subjects and well-presented displays on the walls show the different subjects pupils cover. In a history lesson in Year 6, pupils were suitably challenged as they explored how changes in technology have changed entertainment. After a swift start to the lesson, pupils enthusiastically worked in groups to match dates with events on a timeline, using research, mathematical and reading skills. From January 2014, leaders are introducing a new curriculum for the foundation subjects which is based on the new National Curriculum programmes of study to be introduced from September 2014. After research and consultation with staff, leaders consider this will meet the interests and abilities of the pupils. English and mathematics will be taught discretely. It is vital that the application of this idea is checked carefully for the effect on pupils' achievement.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching across the school remains uneven but all staff want to do the best for their pupils. Since my previous visit, there have been further changes to the

team of teachers with new teachers in Years 1, 2 and 3. New teachers have received a range of activities to introduce them to the school so they know the direction it is taking. These teachers have brought enthusiasm and complementary skills to contribute to the whole-school commitment to improving the school. Established teachers have worked together with new staff to create a team which is supportive of each other and to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. Established teachers have also continued to develop their practice and use skills they have learned from training last year. As a result, evidence shows that teachers are honing their skills in planning interesting activities, using information and communication technology, focusing on the correct mathematical terminology, and moving around the room to support pupils or move pupils on in their learning. For new teachers these skills are not so evident and more training would be beneficial.

During this visit I saw a distinct improvement in the contribution teaching assistants make to the learning of pupils. In several lessons, teaching assistants were working with more-able pupils from the start, to match learning precisely to their ability. Many of these activities were set as problems to make pupils think and apply new learning. Similarly, I witnessed teaching assistants working effectively with small groups of pupils for reading activities or to work with pupils with specific difficulties.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The positive learning atmosphere identified during my last visit remains. Walls are covered with pupils' work which is tastefully displayed. Pupils' achievements are valued. Pupils get on well with each other and with staff. They are happy to talk about their work and refer to their targets. Pupils are polite and willingly stand aside to let adults pass through a doorway. The new behaviour procedure is being used so that pupils are clear about what is expected of them and the consequences of any poor behaviour. Pupils feel that this is used by most teachers but are not convinced it is used by all teachers consistently. It would be worthwhile reviewing the procedure with all staff to ensure consistent application so that all pupils feel confident about the process. The small group of parents I spoke with have no worries about behaviour or bullying, and the schools' recent survey echoes this view.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has brought renewed vigour to the school. She has won the trust of staff, parents and pupils. Together with the governors, she has set a clear path for improvement which has been communicated so that staff are in no doubt how swiftly the school needs to move. All involved are determined to raise the performance of the school for the benefit of the pupils. The appointment of a permanent deputy headteacher has strengthened leadership. Together they are building on the foundations established by the previous team. Through continuing with the weekly monitoring and evaluation system, they have quickly got to know

the school and identified priorities for improvement. These have been captured in a school improvement plan with a clear direction to guide improvement, appropriate action and timescales. Activities to check the quality of teaching include observations of practice, scrutinies of books and tracking of pupils' progress information. Leaders use this information to identify training needs and to check that this has had the desired effect. Procedures for checking on pupils' progress are much stronger. Pupils' progress is measured each half term in reading, writing and mathematics and this information is evaluated by senior leaders. Leaders hold pupil progress meetings with individual teachers to identify action to support and challenge pupils.

New leaders for mathematics and English are confident in their role and understand their contribution to improvement in pupils' achievement. With some support from the local authority, they have developed action plans which guide their work and link with the school improvement plan. Through looking at teachers' lesson plans, observing some teachers in the classroom and scrutinising pupils' work books, they are building a clear picture of pupils' progress, while developing skills in leadership. They have supported new colleagues in aspects of practice and purchased identified resources, for example, new reading books which appeal to boys. All teachers are responsible for leading a subject and are supported by link governors. However, this is at an early stage of development.

Systems for checking on the performance of teachers have been used to review teachers' targets from last year and to set new ones. There is a direct link between assessing teachers' performance and the achievement of pupils.

Governance is much stronger than at the time of the inspection. New members have brought significant skills. The new Chair of the Governing Body has kept a watchful eye on the progress of the school, while improving the effectiveness of the governing body. She has systematically reviewed and re-organised committees to enable governors to carry out their roles efficiently. She has appointed governors with the right skills and knowledge to lead each of the committees. Governors have reviewed their action plan which guides their strategic involvement in the school. Through linking governors to each class and each subject, and regular visits to the school, governors are building up their knowledge of the school which is not reliant on senior leaders. As a result, they are in a better position to hold senior leaders to account for their decisions. With the support of the diocese, governors agreed to the extension and re-furbishment of the Early Years Foundation Stage area; this has led to a more suitable class space for the younger pupils to learn. Governors make sure that the pupil premium funding is used for those pupils for whom it is intended and this year those pupils did better than their peers.

The school is at a crucial point on its journey. Stability in leadership and staffing are cause for optimism for the school to make rapid progress over the next term so that pupils' progress accelerates and gaps in learning are minimised.

External support

Due to the arrival of the acting headteacher, the local authority has made more visits to the school than would normally be expected at this stage in the special measures journey. However, this support has been specifically to assist leadership in quickly building up knowledge of the school. Similarly, support has been given to coach subject leaders new to their roles and to train new staff in practice received by other staff last year. All teachers have visited an outstanding school to observe practice in the classroom.