

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

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

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

11 December 2013

Mrs Elisabeth Blanden
The Acting Headteacher
St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone
Queen's Road
Maidstone
ME16 0LB

Dear Mrs Blanden

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Following my visit with Veronica Young, Additional Inspector, 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 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 March 2013. 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.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.
The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve teaching so that it is good, by ensuring teachers:
 - actively engage pupils' interest in lessons and move learning on at a brisk pace
 - provide work that matches pupils' abilities
 - provide good opportunities for pupils to work independently
 - question pupils effectively so that they are challenged to think and deepen their knowledge.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing and mathematics by:
 - providing appropriately challenging tasks for pupils who need extra help to extend their literacy and numeracy skills
 - ensuring that pupils clearly understand what they should be focusing on in their learning
 - giving pupils effective guidance and feedback about how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge by responding to teachers' feedback.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - making sure leaders' judgements about pupils' progress are accurate, and that they take action where data show progress is less than good
 - checking on teaching rigorously, especially in writing and mathematics, and telling teachers clearly what they need to do to improve their practice
 - providing staff with the information and effective training they need to identify how to improve pupils' progress
 - ensuring governors ask challenging questions about the information they are given and so hold leaders to account for pupils' progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 December 2013

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and examples of pupils' work, and observed teaching in 15 lessons, including six joint observations conducted either with the acting headteacher or acting deputy headteacher. Discussions were held with the senior team, a group of middle leaders, a group of governors, including the Chair, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese. The inspectors also met with groups of pupils from Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 and the lead inspector spoke to a few parents at the beginning of the day.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, in March 2013, the substantive headteacher has been absent from school. Since the previous monitoring inspection, in July 2013, one teacher has left the school and one teacher has been appointed to cover the acting deputy headteacher's class.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Unvalidated published data about pupils' achievement show a disappointing legacy of poor progress and attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and more-able pupils. However, analysis of the school's current information about pupils' progress, from September 2013, shows that progress overall is accelerating rapidly. Pupils are catching up and on track to meet or exceed national expectations as a result of targeted support and effective intervention work in and out of the classroom. Programmes of extra lessons and booster classes make a significant contribution to pupils' accelerated progress, notably in mathematics. Pupils benefit from additional help, including a lunchtime reading group involving paired work with older and younger pupils and extra mathematics lessons for more-able pupils provided by teachers from the neighbouring secondary school.

Considerable attention has been paid to validating and standardising the school's own assessments and there is clear evidence that teachers' and senior leaders' evaluations of pupils' progress and attainment are accurate. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals make good progress and their achievement compares favourably with their peers in the school and nationally.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection, but is not yet consistently good. The small proportion of inadequate teaching has not been eradicated and too much teaching still requires improvement overall because not all teachers use information about individual pupils to plan sufficiently challenging activities that match their abilities. However, a significant number of weaknesses in teaching have

been tackled successfully. The strong focus on improving pupils' engagement in their own learning is evident in all classes; pupils are working at a faster pace, are attentive and diligent, and usually discuss their work with enthusiasm. Pupils generally show more understanding about what they should be focusing on in their work and most are working more independently. Less time is wasted in unnecessary lengthy introductions to lessons or explanations that repeat what pupils already know. Most teachers are questioning pupils more closely, providing productive opportunities for pupils to give extended answers and explore ideas with partners. Pupils told inspectors that the increased opportunities to discuss their learning and work on their own were helping them to make progress.

Most teachers deploy teaching assistants and other adults more effectively to support pupils. In better lessons teachers direct teaching assistants to participate actively in the introductions to lessons, by note taking and recording of pupils' responses and key words. Some pupils, however, are not encouraged to be independent or given enough time to respond in detail to the teaching assistants' questions.

Teachers are using more inspiring and relevant resources to interest the pupils, and most classrooms contain helpful working walls and attractive celebratory displays of pupils' work. Teachers now mark pupils' work regularly and most are using the marking policy consistently, providing helpful feedback and advice for pupils about what to improve. Pupils have planned time in lessons to review their work and respond to the advice, although not all teachers' comments are sufficiently directed to what pupils actually need to do next.

Teachers now review pupils' progress regularly and accurately but, in weaker lessons, teachers do not check on pupils' understanding frequently enough as the lesson progresses and do not adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. In a few lessons, the most able pupils are not challenged or pushed enough.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to be good. As at the previous visit in July, pupils are courteous, friendly and eager to learn. Pupils in all classes are settled, purposeful and work hard. Attendance has also improved since the first monitoring inspection. Pupils have responded extremely well to the improvements in teaching and their teachers' raised expectations. Their positive relationships with each other and their willingness to learn contribute well to their increasing rates of progress. Pupils said that sometimes they felt that behaviour in the playground was rough and boisterous. They also expressed a few concerns about the busy road outside the school and when parents drop off their children in the car park. However, the lead inspector saw that the car park was well supervised in the morning by parent volunteers and members of the school staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The senior leadership team has been strengthened considerably since the monitoring inspection in July. This is a major step forward and has resulted in improved progress for the pupils. The senior team is more ambitious, confident and decisive; relationships among the staff are more positive, professional and focused on improvement. The acting headteacher has a sound grasp of how much progress pupils need to make to meet and exceed national expectations and she has a clear understanding of how teaching needs to improve. The acting deputy headteacher now has time out of the classroom to fulfil her leadership role and she has already made a substantial contribution to the increasing rate of progress, particularly in mathematics.

Subject leaders and leaders of key stages are also contributing to improvements in pupils' progress through carefully planned interventions and extra help, particularly for those pupils who need to catch up after experiencing a period of poor teaching. The work of the leader for inclusion is not sufficiently focused on accelerating pupils' progress, and the achievement of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs remains a concern.

Senior leaders are rightly focusing on increasing the proportion of good and better teaching. They observe lessons regularly, analyse pupils' progress and scrutinise pupils' books. In the joint observations with the inspectors, senior leaders accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in lessons and their judgements of teaching were correct. They then gave detailed, confident and useful feedback to help the teachers to improve.

Senior leaders set teachers challenging performance management targets, based on evaluations of their teaching. All teachers are now expected to prepare thoroughly for pupil progress meetings, analysing and evaluating information about how well their pupils are doing, identifying those who need extra help to catch up and ensuring that appropriate additional work is provided. Senior leaders have made sure that teachers and teaching assistants visit other schools to see what good and outstanding teaching looks like, and that staff benefit from focused training and development programmes. However, senior leaders have not tackled the small amount of inadequate teaching with enough urgency.

The school improvement plan has been improved and now focuses sharply on the areas for improvement. The plan outlines clearly who will be responsible for evaluating each improvement and targets are broken down into small steps so that progress can be judged more closely. The acting headteacher provides a useful and regular update for parents, outlining the progress the school is making; parents told the lead inspector that they were pleased with the improved communication from the school.

Since the first monitoring inspection, there have been significant improvements to the governing body. Governors work in more streamlined and strategic committees and have a better understanding of their responsibilities and accountability.

Governors demonstrate much more commitment to being involved in the day-to-day life of the school, creating better relationships with staff. They have benefited from the guidance of a national lead for governance and a comprehensive range of appropriate training. They work more closely with the school leadership team and appreciate the honest, clear and precise reports received in good time from the acting headteacher. Governors' questions are more incisive and searching; governors no longer accept what is presented without asking about the impact on pupils' progress.

External support

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is now fit for purpose and that it focuses specifically on the areas for improvement. The local authority also worked closely with the school to improve the school action plan, so that it clearly outlines success criteria and who will be responsible for monitoring improvements.

Since the first monitoring inspection, the diocese and local authority have worked together more closely and effectively to provide the right support for the school. A consultant headteacher has supported the acting headteacher with strategic planning and advice about improvements to teaching. A school improvement adviser from the local authority has also been working with the school, visiting fortnightly and commissioning further specialist support for English and mathematics. Extensive training programmes and visits to good and outstanding schools have helped to restore teachers' confidence and increase their expertise. The school also benefits from extra advice and teaching from the neighbouring secondary school.