

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
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 9146
Direct email: clare.benson@serco.com



18 December 2013

Bernadette Sims
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Stanier Street
Newcastle-under-Lyme
ST5 2SU

Dear Miss Sims

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 governors provide sufficient challenge for example, by asking questions which focus on how the actions of leaders are leading to improvements
- make sure that governors develop their understanding of sources of information about pupils' progress such as Ofsted's Data Dashboard so that they can make more informed judgements about how well pupils are doing
- check that minutes of meetings provide sufficient detail when recording governors' questions and the responses of school leaders.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the two deputy headteachers, representatives of the governing body including the Chair, and a representative of

the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was also evaluated. We discussed your summary of the actions taken to date and looked at records from the checks that leaders have made on teaching and learning. A summary of pupils' progress for the term was evaluated and minutes from governors meetings were reviewed.

Context

Since the inspection in October one teacher has left the school and another teacher is now working as a Higher Level Teaching Assistant. One new teacher has been appointed. You have not yet been successful in making a second appointment and will re-advertise in the spring term. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed since the inspection. Governors and school leaders are currently consulting the school community about becoming part of a multi academy company. The proposed date for conversion to academy status is 1 April 2014.

Main findings

You and the two deputy headteachers have responded promptly and effectively to plan and implement the necessary actions in response to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your plan to improve the school is sharply focused on improving teaching and on raising standards. The plan identifies clearly the steps that must be taken, the planned timescales and key milestones and those who are responsible for leading each aspect. The actions that you have already taken are clearly documented and early evidence is showing positive impact on pupils' progress.

When checking on the quality of teaching you are now much more closely focused on what pupils are learning in lessons. Monitoring has included lesson observations and evaluation of the work in pupils' books as well as the analysis of information about pupils' progress. You are improving the feedback given so that it is precise enough to ensure that teachers know what they must improve. You have made sure that where teaching requires improvement, an individual plan is in place to ensure that teaching improves. These teachers have been given opportunities to learn from the work of the most effective teachers in the school and in partner schools.

All teachers now have meetings with senior leaders each half term to discuss the progress of pupils in their classes. This means that any underachievement is quickly identified and teachers work together to ensure that the right support is put in place to help pupils catch up. Teachers have worked together with teachers from other schools to check that their judgements about the standard of pupils' work are accurate and consistent.

Leaders have worked with teachers to improve the way they mark pupil's work. Teachers are now helping pupils to learn more quickly by identifying the next steps that they need to take to improve their work. Your monitoring of pupil's work shows

that this is being used effectively by most teachers. Support and further checking is planned to ensure that this becomes consistent across the school. Leaders have talked to pupils and have found that they are now clearer about what they are learning and about what they need to work on next.

All teachers have attended training to improve their skills in teaching mathematics. New resources have been purchased and monitoring of lessons shows that these are being used well. Teachers are now giving pupils more opportunities to develop and practise their mental calculation skills in lessons. Pupils are also being given additional opportunities to apply their mathematics skills to a range of problems. These changes have already resulted in improved progress in mathematics. Teachers have used 'Shine' days and workshops effectively to help parents to find out about what their children are learning in mathematics. This is helping parents to support their children's learning at home.

Governors visit school regularly and have looked at books and talked to pupils about their views and experiences. This has helped them to have a good understanding of the areas requiring improvement and know about the actions being taken in school. Governors have identified areas where they need further training and support. For example, they have recently received training to help them analyse pupils' progress in comparison to pupils nationally. The Chair of the Governing Body has also enrolled on a course for those new to the role.

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 school is working effectively in partnership with the local authority. An officer visits each half term to work with school leaders to monitor and evaluate progress. The local authority has also secured support from ENTRUST and from other local schools. This support has helped the school to move forward quickly. A Local Leader of Education has begun to provide support for governors. Governors may wish to clarify how support will be provided to the school if it becomes an academy.

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

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector