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18 December 2013

Mrs Chris Mason (acting headteacher)

Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School

Brunswick Street

Parr

St Helens

Merseyside

WA9 2JE

Dear Mrs Mason

Special measures monitoring inspection of Holy Spirit 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 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. I toured the school and spoke with a few pupils. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection the headteacher has left the school. Two other members of staff are on maternity leave and their classes are covered by supply teachers. The acting headteacher joined the school on 11 November and leads the school for three days per week. For the other two days the deputy headteacher leads the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Governors and senior leaders accepted the judgement of the recent inspection. The local authority created a strategic plan to guide the school on its journey of improvement. The Archdiocese and local authority worked together to find a replacement for the outgoing headteacher and provide strong leadership so the school could move on swiftly. The acting headteacher has brought enthusiasm, experience and a clear-sighted resolve to ensure pupils receive the best possible education. She has set a strict direction for governors, staff and parents and has established a team-working approach. Through her calm but decisive manner she has raised staff morale and parents' confidence in the school. Taking the recommendations from the recent inspection and her own evaluations of the school, including lesson observations, she has produced a raising-achievement plan which links well to the local authority plan. This sets out the exact actions the school needs to take to move quickly and correctly places improving the quality of teaching as its core. The detail in this plan covers the period up to March. It would be fitting to review the local authority plan and this operational plan to form a cohesive long-term approach so all involved can easily plot the progress of the school.

The Chair of the Governing Body lost no time in arranging a review of governance. Members have worked with a National Lead for Governance to evaluate their effectiveness. Vacancies are filled and new members have been recruited for their specific skills so that responsibilities can be shared. All governors have completed a skills audit and the Chair is using this information to allocate governors with the right skills to specific committees. Governors have received training in pupil progress information so that they are in a stronger position to hold senior leaders to account for the performance of pupils. Governors have produced their own plan to guide future action and they are starting to get to know the school through making visits and talking to teachers. A small group of governors are now meeting monthly to check on the performance of the school more strictly.

It would be beneficial for the local authority to stipulate, in their plan, the different groups which will monitor and evaluate the school's progress.

Much has been achieved in the short time the acting headteacher has led the school. Vital systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, tracking the progress of pupils and improving behaviour and safety have been introduced. However, it is essential that this positive start drives momentum and much depends on the acting headteacher. The local authority, governors and the Archdiocese should review the arrangements for sustaining improvement so that the acting headteacher is suitably supported in this task.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector