

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

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



29 January 2014

Mrs Bernie Fisher
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Berwick
Prince Edward Road
Tweedmouth
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 2EX

Dear Mrs Fisher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Berwick, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2014, 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.

This was the first monitoring inspection visit 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the external review of governance is carried out quickly
- identify areas where governing body training is needed to help increase its capacity to adequately hold the school, including senior leaders, to account for all aspects of the school's provision.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the recent inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with the diocesan link officer to discuss their role in helping the school make the improvements required. The school action plan was also evaluated.

Context

There have been no significant changes in staffing or the composition of the governing body since the previous inspection.

Main findings

The headteacher has acted promptly in writing a post-Ofsted action plan, which sensibly focuses on each of the three improvement areas and each of the sub-actions identified in the report. While the range of actions to be taken by the school are relevant and appropriate to address these improvement areas, some lack sufficient clarity about the relative rate of improvement sought over the life of the plan. Furthermore, the absence of any audit of where the school currently stands in relation to each of these improvement areas makes it difficult for senior leaders, especially governors, to know what progress should be made, and at what rate, over the life of the plan. Milestones for measuring the rate of progress are not sufficiently linked to meetings of the recently formed steering group, which was set up to specifically monitor and overview the progress of the school against the areas for improvement. This group, which comprise the headteacher, three governors including the chair, the local authority and diocesan officers who are linked with the school, has met twice but its findings have yet to be reviewed by the full governing body.

The governing body, which has a significant number of new members who joined just before the recent inspection, has a low level of understanding about key aspects of the school's work, which need to be regularly and robustly monitored so that appropriate challenges can be made of senior leaders in the school. This weakness is recognised by the headteacher, local authority and diocesan link officers. An external review of governance, which was identified in the recent inspection report, has been too slow in coming, which means that this has severely limited the governing body's developing capacity to provide the robust challenge needed to help bring about improvements in overall leadership and management.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. Given the concerns about governance, there will be a further visit the school in the very near future to re-assess the progress of governors in meeting their required responsibilities to monitor and challenge the school to achieve the improvements required.

External support

The local authority is now providing appropriate and proportionate support for the school, but without the ability of the governing body to respond and act independently of it, the developing capacity of governors to monitor, challenge and support senior leaders is severely weakened.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector