

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

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Mrs C Lewis
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Worthing
Cobden Road
Worthing
BN11 4BD

Dear Mrs Lewis

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

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 November 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:

- monitor classroom processes frequently and give rapid and good quality support to teachers to carry out the agreed strategies of the newly formed achievement groups
- capitalise on existing links with other schools, and develop new ones, so as to be able to share learning, and support each other.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and other senior staff, members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You and I briefly visited all classrooms in the school to see

teaching and learning. I checked aspects of safeguarding and I evaluated the school improvement plan.

Main findings

You, your senior staff and the governing body have responded positively and energetically to the outcomes of the previous inspection. The local authority and the governors have confidence in your capacity to improve this school. You have set your sights on securing at least good standards of teaching and learning in every classroom over the next year and the school improvement plans reflect this ambition and determination. These plans contain a range of useful ways of driving improvements, and give governors good opportunities to gauge the progress you will have made against the clear definitions of what should be achieved at key points over the year. Your senior staff show high levels of commitment to supporting you to make the changes necessary.

You have adopted a commercially produced model of school improvement and one that you feel reflects the school's existing strengths and ethos, and offers appropriate challenges. The possible advantages of this approach are that staff and governors will rapidly acquire a common understanding of the means by which improvement will come about, and potentially fruitful links with other schools and the parent company can be established. Such links are not yet well developed and you are aware that they are a crucial part of the strategy. The school is currently a member of a local family of schools in Worthing, a wider group of Worthing schools and a deanery group of local Catholic schools, but these networks do not always involve strong collaborative work on school improvement; you are usefully reflecting on how you can bring this about.

Important aspects of your school improvement strategy will be carried out by the new 'achievement teams', which focus on improving specific aspects of the school's work. A good early focus is on pupils' understanding and use of punctuation. The already better strategic use of assessment information by these teams is a strong response to an area for improvement. For example, children in Reception now have their learning gauged with more precision so that their teachers can recognise and support their progress better. As an aspect of the work of these achievement teams, there has been some productive analysis of effective teaching strategies and there are plans to develop a coaching model soon. Some targeted training has begun, and this has included some useful collaborative approaches to analysing lesson planning in Years 3 and 4. Training has also been provided in ways of meeting the needs of more able pupils through the provision of work designed to challenge and stretch them; this has been better received in the older year groups so far. Two subject leaders are closely involved in the Primary Mathematics Specialist Teacher Programme (MAST) at the University of Brighton and this is supporting your aim of sharing good practice across teachers. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation

Stage has begun to address the need to improve children's skills in exploration, investigation and independence by broadening their knowledge and understanding of the world through good community links and better use of information and communication technology. The use of tablet computers is currently being planned in liaison with another local school. We agreed that the close monitoring of how all of these strategies support better teaching and learning in classrooms will be a key factor in the success of the achievement groups.

Governors have responded well to the need to work differently in order to achieve better outcomes for pupils. They are reorganising their committee structure and now emphasise monitoring the quality of learning and teaching much more closely in their meeting agendas. There are plans for governors to be paired with senior staff organising the work of the achievement groups, to be able to monitor progress closely. Some good training has been provided by the local authority in the use of performance data.

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 local authority's support currently involves two visits each term by a link adviser who will monitor progress against your action plan and offer support with strategic issues, and some support with the use of achievement information. You and governors have been reassured that more help is available at any point, if it were needed. I am satisfied that the local authority is providing an appropriate level of support for the school at this stage. The diocese provides general support for your wellbeing, and they are organising links with a local teaching school alliance, and with another school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector