

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

T 0300 123 1231

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

Direct T 01695 566855

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: gail.hill@cfbt.com



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Miss A Wolstanholme
Acting Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Fleetwood
London Street
Fleetwood
Lancashire
FY7 6EU

Dear Miss Wolstanholme

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

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 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 December 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:

- stabilise staffing as soon as possible so that pupils have continuity in their education
- amend the development plan to focus on a smaller number of achievable actions which can be implemented immediately and to good effect to improve teaching in classrooms
- ensure that strategies to improve writing or reading have a clear policy and procedure so that there is a continuity and rigour of approach across the school

- provide a range of appropriate resources for the summer term to ensure that teachers gain confidence in teaching a range of subjects effectively in order to develop literacy across the curriculum
- complete an audit of governor skills to identify gaps in experience and knowledge in order that relevant training can be provided to enable them to challenge school leaders more effectively.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself and your associate headteacher, the Chair of the Governing body and two other governors as well as a group of pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with the local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. The school's development plan was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with yourself focused on reading and literacy and the consistency with which this was being applied across the school.

Context

The substantive headteacher continues to be absent long-term and the school is currently managed by an acting headteacher supported by an associate headteacher. The school continues to suffer from on-going staff turbulence. Since the summer a number of staff, including three teachers, have resigned or moved to new jobs. Gaps and absences are being filled by temporary staff. Currently there is no deputy headteacher, but it is hoped to recruit one shortly. Two new governors have also been appointed recently.

Main findings

The post inspection action plan is a lengthy tome. In its present form it is too complex and unwieldy and it is difficult to identify clearly the actions which will impact on improving the areas of weakness identified in the inspection report. Senior leaders have presented some ideas to show how they intend to improve practice in the classroom. How they are to achieve this is less clear. There is also little evidence to identify the criteria by which they will measure if they are successful or not. There is a need to streamline the plan and focus on simple but effective actions which will impact directly on and support learning in the classroom. For example, ensuring that as a matter of policy, all teachers are using vocabulary walls to improve spelling and develop the wider use of new words. Currently, there is an over-emphasis on monitoring which will identify and reinforce weaknesses rather than address them.

Teachers are beginning to benefit from the more intensive support and training they are receiving to improve writing, in particular. However, with high staff turnover at the moment, it is difficult to plan a cohesive programme of training until this issue has been stabilised. Year 6 pupils were positive about the fact that they were

benefitting from not having much disruption to their learning this year, following a chaotic Year 5 when they had been taught by seven different teachers. The picture is not this positive across the school as a whole because on-going staff turbulence continues to slow any improvement. Staffing stability will determine whether this school can accelerate improvements in the summer and autumn terms.

Year 6 pupils, who were interviewed, were positive about the changes being made. They identified that their lessons were more focussed and organised and this was impacting positively on their learning. Spelling cards and journals have been introduced and this is helping to improve their grammar, spelling and punctuation. They also felt that they were being more rigorously challenged and tested. They were excited by the recent setting up of a School Council to provide them with a pupil voice and they noted that the playground environment had also been improved. They did not express disappointment about the demise of 'golden time' on a Friday as they felt that this time was wasted rather than used constructively. This was a very mature sentiment. Pupils are very responsible and keen for the school to become a good school.

Inconsistencies remain across the school. Although pupils in Year 6 are predicted to make expected progress in the summer external examinations. Few will make more than expected progress because of the legacy of underachievement in previous classes when their learning was disrupted by frequent changes of teacher.

English and mathematics leaders are being made more accountable for their subjects and are being trained to become more effective in terms of developing and monitoring provision across the school. This training is on-going. Support is also being provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to raise the quality of provision in this area. However, further work needs to be done, particularly in making the outdoor area more conducive for learning for the younger pupils. There is also a clear need for writing, reading and calculations policies to be put in place and be functioning as new staff are appointed to ensure continuity and consistency in learning, something which many pupils have not previously had.

Monitoring by the two senior leaders is secure and weak practice has been challenged. This has involved a wide range of approaches including lesson observations alongside scrutinies of work and planning. Governors with an experience in education have also been involved in observing this process. This has enable them to get a better picture of how the school is functioning. Personalised support has been provided for a number of weaker teachers. Currently, the school is in a state of transition and will continue to be so until staffing issues are resolved.

Governors have become more pro-active and this has been helped by new appointments with an educational background. There is a greater challenge offered to school managers but more governors need to get involved and participate in this process. Currently, there is no audit of skills and experience which would be helpful in identifying governor training needs.

External support

Prior to the inspection, the school had already been identified as high risk by the local authority. The appointment of an acting headteacher and an executive headteacher was brokered to help and manage the school. In addition, the local authority has provided good support and training from the monitoring and inspection team especially for English, improving classroom practice and EYFS. The local authority has been fully supportive of the school and has plans in place to limit the impact of any staff movement in the summer term, with a clear target of stabilising the school for the start of the new academic year in September.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector