

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 5307
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: Rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com



2 April 2014

Mrs P Walters
Executive Headteacher
St Francis Catholic Primary School
Mill Road
Shelfield
Walsall
West Midlands
WS4 1RH

Dear Mrs Walters

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Boyle, Additional inspector, to your school on 27–28 March 2014, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage and one in Key Stage 2 before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Walsall and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely
Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2013

- Improve teaching so that it helps pupils to make good or better progress by making sure that all teachers:
 - expect much more of their pupils, both in the amount of work they will do and the intellectual challenge they provide, and do not accept mediocre work
 - understand the information they have about how well pupils are doing and use it to set work at the right level for all groups in their class
 - provide lessons that motivate and encourage high levels of attentiveness
 - improve the use of questions in lessons to check pupils' understanding and involve them more in their learning.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2 by:
 - developing pupils' calculating skills and their ability to use them to solve problems
 - giving pupils the chance to practise them in a range of subjects and topics
 - teaching pupils how to write in a fluent, neat style and how to present their work
 - giving pupils more interesting opportunities to write at length and at a good standard across a wide range of topics and subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders by:
 - making sure that the headteacher and other leaders keep a close check on the progress of different groups of pupils
 - taking rapid action when pupils or groups fall behind, and using the information about progress to evaluate actions they take
 - checking rigorously that all teaching is good enough to lead to at least good learning and progress and accurately identifying where improvements are needed
 - ensuring that senior leaders hold all teachers strongly to account for the quality of teaching and how well pupils achieve
 - using the pupil premium funding effectively to support eligible pupils who are at risk of underachieving.
- Ensure that governors have the skills and confidence to monitor and check the work of the school.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other senior staff from Holte School, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other members, a representative of the local authority, groups of pupils in formal discussions, in lessons and at break times and several parents as they brought their children to school.

Context

The headteacher has been absent through ill health since mid-February. He is due to retire at the end of this term. The local authority arranged support from a local Catholic school and from Holte School, which is a national support school. From the end of February, executive leadership has been provided by the executive headteacher (who is a National Leader of Education) and three senior staff from Holte School. The roles of subject coordinators and other leaders have been restructured. The local authority has carried out a review of governance.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In a short time, executive leaders have built a detailed picture of pupils' achievement across the school. This gives leaders and teachers helpful information about the rates of progress made by different groups. However, leaders are aware that teachers' judgements about the levels pupils are working at have not been accurate in the past and have plans to address this quickly. While some information is not accurate, it does show that gaps in achievement still exist. In many classes boys achieve less well than girls and pupils who are eligible for support from the pupil premium, which is additional funding from the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority, are still a long way behind other pupils.

Improvements are evident in pupils' books but there is still a long way to go. Pupils are now being given more chances to write in different subjects, such as history. Nevertheless, books still show that pupils do not write often enough for long periods of time. Pupils' mathematical skills are improving in some classes. For example, some pupils were observed practising calculation skills by solving a problem about different ways they could make a fence of a given perimeter. However, their books show this kind of opportunity does not happen frequently. Teachers say they now place greater emphasis on presentation, but some books are still very untidy. Consequently, pupils' progress remains uneven across the school and is still slower than expected in some classes.

The quality of teaching

The executive leadership team has quickly identified what needs to improve in teaching and has well-focused plans to train and support teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers say they are now clear about what is expected of them and that they are confident the support will help them to improve. They are keen to receive and act upon advice. There is a sense of commitment, shared by teachers and teaching assistants, to make rapid improvement in teaching.

In some classes, teachers now have higher expectation of what pupils can achieve, so lessons are more challenging. Pupils' books show this is still not so in all classes and in all subjects. Consequently, teaching is still not strong enough to ensure pupils catch up from previous poor achievement. Some teachers still do not understand what levels pupils are working at and so the work they set is either too easy or too hard for some pupils. Training is scheduled over the next few weeks to help them improve these skills.

Inspectors observed some interesting lessons which motivated pupils to work hard and succeed. For example, pupils talked excitedly about how to use words creatively to make their poetry appeal to the reader. They challenged one another and were very supportive of each other's efforts. In some lessons, pupils were less enthusiastic because they did not enjoy the activities given.

Some teachers and teaching assistants have responded well to recent training on using questions. Several good examples were seen where questions were used to help pupils learn more effectively. For example, in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a teaching assistant carefully questioned a group of children about the sounds they needed to write their list of ingredients for making 'alien juice'. On the other hand, some teachers still miss opportunities to clarify misunderstandings or to challenge pupils to think at higher levels.

Teachers now all follow agreed procedures for marking pupils' work. They write comments about what has gone well and make suggestions for what needs to improve. These comments are often imprecise and do not make it clear what pupils need to do next. Where next steps are given, pupils are rarely given opportunities to make the required improvement and teachers do not check whether comments have made a difference to the quality of work in the future.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to conduct themselves well around school. They are polite and courteous to adults and treat each other with respect. This is also true in lessons that are interesting. Pupils were observed sensitively helping others who were struggling with their work. Where teaching does not capture their imagination, pupils' attention drifts easily and they lose enthusiasm. New systems for checking on

behaviour have been introduced and leaders are now more able to respond quickly should problems occur. Similarly, there is now a more structured approach to following up on pupils who are absent, so all instances are checked quickly. As a result, the number of pupils who are often absent has reduced. The school is aware that there are still some groups of pupils, especially those eligible for free school meals, whose attendance is a cause for concern.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive leadership team is quickly building capacity within the school. There is now a shared commitment to improvement. Parents and carers say leadership is more visible, which they appreciate. Pupils say they like the changes that are being made. Staff feel well supported and appropriately challenged to improve pupils' achievement.

The restructured approach to leading subjects and year groups has increased the capacity of leaders at all levels to hold teachers to account. As a result, teachers now accept responsibility for progress made by their pupils. The newly introduced achievement summaries provide clear information to enable leaders at all levels to tackle underperformance. Systems for keeping a close check on the quality of teaching and to provide continuous support and challenge to teachers are now in place.

Governance is improving, although governors know there is still a way to go. They have worked closely with the local authority to secure more effective leadership of the school. Governors are more challenging and have a better understanding of what information they need to build an accurate picture of how the school is improving. Governors should ensure that the review of the use of pupil premium funding, recommended at the inspection in September, takes place as soon as possible. At the time of this visit, governors had only just received the report of the external review of governance and so had not had time to respond to the recommendations made within it.

External support

Since the first monitoring visit, the local authority has arranged support for the leadership of the school. Some of this has focused on supporting the school to maintain its strong Catholic ethos. The support from Holte School has established stronger leadership systems, able to secure the capacity of the school to sustain improvement. However, not enough dialogue exists between the school and local authority and so there is not a shared understanding about what support is needed. The local authority has taken too long to complete the review of governance and to share the findings. Consequently, the process has had little impact at this stage. Termly review group meetings have been modified recently to increase the degree of challenge about the rate of improvement.