

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 566939
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: glaw@cfbt.com



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Mr Ian Walsh
Headteacher
St Luke's CofE Primary School
Albion Street
Chadderton
Oldham
Lancashire
OL9 9HT

Dear Mr Walsh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Luke's CofE Primary School, Oldham

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on my findings. Thank you for the help you gave 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:

- Make sure children in Key Stage 1 are taught in classes with 30 or less pupils
- Check that the assessments of children's skills and development when they start in Reception are accurate.
- Devise action plans that not only tackle aspects of the school that need to be improved but also take into account what needs to be done to become good at the next inspection.

Evidence

During the visit I met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher and toured the school to have a brief look at what pupils were learning. I met with a representative of the local authority and spoke briefly with another representative over the telephone. I met with three governors.

Main findings

- Senior leaders have taken action to increase pupils' achievement in mathematics. They have introduced smaller teaching groups in the juniors including a group of the most-able pupils who are working at a level usually associated with Year 9 of secondary school. The teachers now plan lessons based on pupils' needs rather than from a national or commercial scheme. As a result of these changes pupils' progress has quickened and more are on track to be at the level they should for their age.
- Senior leaders have introduced a new system for pupils to check and correct their spelling mistakes. They have also introduced a better way of developing pupils' vocabulary. As a result, pupils' work now shows that they can use more interesting and technical vocabulary in their work. Teachers have been trained in how to improve pupils' writing through for example, developing pupils' speaking skills. Consequently younger pupils are writing independently and are writing better quality work. According to the school's own data, pupils are making quicker progress.
- Governors have better oversight over what the school does. They meet monthly to discuss in detail the information about pupils' progress and their learning and they challenge the school to improve. They also check and contribute to the school's improvement plans. They are linked to classes and have a better understanding of how pupils are learning through, for example, observing how staff check on the quality of pupils' work.

The school's plans to improve tackle the issues identified at the inspection but now need to be adapted slightly to plot a route to become good in all aspects by the next inspection. 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

In the past year the relationship between the local authority and the school has been fractious and extremely difficult. For the six weeks up to the inspection there were weekly visits from a school improvement officer, brought in by the authority, but there have been few visits since. As a result, the local authority does not have a full understanding about the quality of the school. The representative for example could not say definitively if the school's assessment of children when they enter the Reception were accurate or not. The local authority service for assigning pupils to different schools has caused St Luke's to have more than 30 children in Year 1 or Year 2 which is contrary to statutory regulation, as a result, the school has been compelled to have too many pupils in each of its infant classes.

The overall impact of the local authority support has been negligible. However, the improvement plans have been improved and the relationship between the school and Oldham has started to heal. It is essential the relationship between local authority and school is fully repaired to enable the school to make quicker progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- < Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation