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Mrs Dawn Nulty

Headteacher

St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton

Flapper Fold Lane

Atherton

Manchester

Lancashire

M46 0HA

Dear Mrs Nulty

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in September 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Director of Children and Families for Wigan.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven

Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good or better by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently plan lessons that challenge all pupils, particularly the most-able, to achieve their best and to be enthusiastic about their learning
 - improving the teaching of phonics (the links between letters and sounds) in Years 1 and 2 so that pupils have a secure grounding in the basic skills they need to learn to read.
- Raise standards in order that pupils, particularly the most-able in Key Stages 1 and 2, achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring spelling, grammar and punctuation skills are taught and applied systematically in all classes
 - extending pupils' abilities to recall key number facts and multiplication tables and to apply them in calculation and problem-solving activities.
- Ensure that recent improvements in pupils' behaviour and in behaviour management systems are systematically monitored to check improvements are continuing and if needed make any necessary changes.
- Improve further the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, in continuing to drive forward the school's improvement by:
 - checking that staff training is having a significant impact on the quality of teaching
 - ensuring all subjects leaders always make rigorous checks on pupils' progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 May 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, six subject leaders, a group of six pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6, four governors, a school development adviser from the local authority and the local leader of education supporting the school. Accompanied by the headteacher, he briefly visited lessons in all seven classes. He scrutinised documents and data showing the impact of the school's actions and how the local authority is supporting and monitoring the school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection 10 children have left the school. There is no common reason why these children have left. Six have joined. In partnership with the deputy headteacher a supply teacher has been teaching part time in Year 2 and has also been teaching small groups of pupils in Year 6 since January 2014. A teacher who was on maternity leave returned to work at the beginning of the spring term 2014 but subsequently resigned her post. A teacher on a temporary contract is absent through illness. Absences have mainly affected the Year 3 class. The school has advertised for two permanent full-time teachers and short lists have been drawn up. Staff joining the school have been appropriately vetted to check their suitability for employment.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The quality of teaching is improving. This is a result of: staff acting on the feedback they have received following lesson observations; staff having opportunities to observe good practice elsewhere; the focused support they have received from specialist leaders in education and a local authority early years specialist; and the training sessions the school has organised. Two teachers whose teaching was previously judged as requiring improvement have left the school and two others have improved their teaching, which is now judged as good. Lessons observations by senior staff and others working with the school gauge that 85% of the teaching is good or better in English and mathematics, with half of this being outstanding. This exceeds the school's milestone target for March 2014. It represents a good improvement from the position at the time of the September 2013 inspection when around 45% of teaching was judged to be good and none outstanding. Senior staff report that teaching by temporary staff has not been as strong as the overall picture paints. The school does not currently have a fully accurate view of the quality of teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics.

The teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation has improved. A scheme of work has been formed and pupils have all been tested, as have staff. Staff needing support to clarify any of their own misconceptions have received this. Teachers are

now turning their attention to ensure the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation is a feature in all subjects.

As a consequence of improved teaching, the rates of progress pupils are making and the standards they reach have improved. In reading, writing and mathematics the proportions of pupils on track to achieve their summer term 2014 targets are very largely at or in advance of the school's expectations. In a small number of cases one or two pupils are not on track. The school has put suitable support in place to accelerate their progress.

In 2013 the national phonics screening check for Year 1 pupils showed that only 29% of pupils reached the appropriate standard. This is a short, simple assessment to make sure that all pupils have learned letters and the sounds they make to an appropriate standard by the age of six. The school's assessments indicate that 77% are expected to reach the standard in the screening this year. This is a result of the improved teaching of phonics, more time being devoted to teaching phonics and better diagnostic assessments that help teachers recognise pupils' misunderstandings.

More than 90% of the pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 are judged to be making the national expected rates of progress from the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics respectively. In each of these areas this is 10% or more in advance of the proportions who made the expected rates of progress in 2013.

The assessment data the school collects on pupils' progress are evaluated well so staff know which pupils are underachieving and why. Arrangements are put in place to map out additional or different support for these pupils including booster classes, an Easter school for Year 6 pupils and in some cases one-to-one support.

The school has become more rigorous in evaluating its work. Senior and middle leaders have an increased focus on the difference the school's actions make to the progress pupils are making and they have regular meetings to check on the progress pupils are making. The improved evaluations are evident in the termly reviews of the school's post Ofsted action plan. The spring term 2014 review includes good evidence throughout of the effect of the school's actions on the quality of teaching and standards reached by pupils.

The governors are playing their part effectively in checking how the school is progressing. They have benefited from training from the local authority. This has given them confidence to ask questions and probe the information they receive. They have a suitable focus on the positive difference the action plan is making. Governors are regularly visiting the school to supplement the information they receive from the reports they are given. They have an accurate review of the steps forward the school has taken.

The pupils say that behaviour is better than it used to be because a few particularly troublesome pupils are no longer at the school and because staff have made the school a more pleasant place to be. They say they like the 'smilies' they receive for good behaviour, attendance, homework and uniform. They also feel that better systems at playtime and lunchtime that enable them to play games in certain areas have greatly reduced the number of fall-outs with friends they experienced in the past. All the staff have received training focused on heading off behaviour difficulties. The observations undertaken by the inspector show that behaviour in classes is good. There was no unacceptable behaviour observed. This mirrors the findings of the local authority's development adviser when he observed lessons.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The morale of staff is high and they are working very well as a team. They are providing good support for each other. There is no shortage of team spirit. Together they are rising to the challenges facing them.
- Staff know the pupils well. The data the school has from its assessments of pupils are extensive. They are being used well to check how pupils are doing and to put in place remedies quickly if they are not doing as well as they could. These are then monitored to ensure they make a positive difference.
- There has been a determined and successful effort to improve the teaching of phonics and of spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- There is good monitoring of English and mathematics. Leaders of these subjects have jointly observed lessons with a local leader of education.
- Teachers' planning is consistently good and is making a strong contribution to improved teaching and learning. It maps out in some detail what different groups of pupils are expected to achieve and matches work to their particular needs. The work of teaching assistants is also included in the planning. There is a confidence among some teaching assistants, especially those who have received training, in teaching small groups of pupils. Invariably they feedback to the teacher about how the pupils have responded so that future plans are well informed.
- The 'assertive mentoring' file that each pupil has makes a very telling contribution to them understanding the progress they are making and what they are aiming toward. Those in Key Stage 2 who met with the inspector were very proud of their files and were keen to explain their use.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Although the turbulence in staffing has settled somewhat, the Year 3 class has been affected most by the temporary and transient nature of staffing over

the past year or so. The school has put strategies in place to alleviate the difficulties. For example, the local authority's behaviour support service has offered advice around how to help Year 3 pupils work together more harmoniously. Very recently a permanent member of staff has been moved to Year 3 to give them the consistency of teaching they need. Nevertheless, the imperative to have a permanent staff team is a priority.

- Senior staff have understandably concentrated on monitoring the quality of teaching in English and mathematics for the last two terms. Monitoring is not as rigorous in other subjects. Senior staff do gain a view of the quality of teaching in other subjects from informal observations but now need to check on the quality of teaching more directly.
- Middle leaders are monitoring their subjects and influencing their colleagues' work to an extent but have fallen short of undertaking direct observations of their peers teaching subjects for which they are responsible. As a consequence, they are not in the best possible position to engage in dialogue about improving the quality of teaching in their subject.

External support

The support orchestrated by the local leader of education has been well received and effective. It has been appropriately targeted. The support of specialist leaders in education, in coordination with that from an early years specialist from the local authority, has moved forward the teaching of phonics at the school. A coherent strategy for teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation has also been formed through these partnerships. Staff have benefited from the opportunities given for them to observe teaching and learning in other schools. The local authority is monitoring and evaluating the school effectively. The development adviser, for example, has recently interviewed three middle leaders to check how they are monitoring their subjects and he met with around 20 parents to gain their view of the progress the school is making.