

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

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566932

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: hcarnall@cfbt.com



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Mrs Victoria Bould
Headteacher
Poulton-le-Sands Church of England Primary School
Church Street
Morecambe
Lancashire, LA4 5QA.

Dear Mrs Bould

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poulton-le-Sands Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 15 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. 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:

- continue to improve writing, building on better presentation by setting more demanding work, with a clear purpose and a real audience
- take the opportunity of curriculum changes that all schools must make to plan science, history, geography and RE so that pupils in Key Stage 2 gain subject-related the language and skills, rather than doing isolated topics
- improve the action plan further by using regular milestones that can be measured in the body of the plan
- on the use of pupil premium, governors to produce a policy and a list of practical improvements to make, from their contact with a partner school.

I can see that the school has stepped up the pace of change since my first visit, but the starting point is such that the school still has much improvement to make. I will keep in touch about achievement of targets for 2014 and may visit again in Autumn.

Evidence

During the visit I met you, the deputy headteacher and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I talked with the Chair of the Governing Body by telephone. I evaluated the school's revised action plan and review of pupil premium, and toured the school to consider display. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 met me to talk about their work. With you and the deputy headteacher, I looked in detail at the work of eighteen pupils. We did a learning walk to three classes in the afternoon. I spent time in the playground at lunch.

Main findings

I came back to the school soon after my first visit to see whether the school has made more progress on key areas affecting children: standards of pupils' writing; displays and materials that children use for learning; and behaviour for learning. I also wanted to see how far senior leaders had sharpened up the action plan.

Classrooms displays have improved. I saw children's work that was recent and legible. Children appeared to take more pride in their work. Motivating topics had been chosen, such as scripting a story for 'Doctor Who'. Teachers had made new sets of learning mats to support children in different sorts of writing. Every class has mats and also banks of words on display. Most materials were accessible but a few were too small or set too high on the wall for children to use.

With the deputy headteacher, we scrutinised children's books from three classes. Basic presentation of writing has got better. For the most part, recent work is longer, has dates and titles, and is more legible. Children I talked with were keen to explain that they now 'take care to be neat', and to improve spelling and punctuation. For some pupils, improvements in English books had carried over to better topic work too. Children's efforts in presentation reflect the recent focus of staff and the changes to the school's action plan.

Some children could identify features of good writing other than neatness, such as an inventive story or interesting characters, but found this harder. Marking, including the way that learning objectives are used in children's work, rewards isolated word-choices rather than fitness for purpose of the work overall: as a factual report in science; a diagram in geography; a newspaper article or play script in English.

More use could be made of real audiences for work, such as making a class newspaper for parents, and of linking reading to writing, drawing out good models from what is read in class. An example of a project working well is a contest to write rules for the new playground equipment. The rules have been agreed by pupils, parents and governors, are on display as posters, and well known by children.

Children also found it harder to explain what 'doing topic work' meant. Older children could identify 'Ancient Greece' and 'The 1960s' as history. With prompting, they

could recall work in science about 'melting ice', magnets or growth of plants. However, they did not readily use any specialist vocabulary for either science or history. They found it hard to explain what a scientist does to answer questions. Some work pupils simply identified as 'topic' with no subject content. Older children are not building up skills and knowledge they need for subjects like science.

Our learning walk was in the last hour of the day. Behaviour in classes has improved. It is also better in the playground, helped greatly by new large and small play equipment and the way that staff work with it in the playground at lunchtime.

Governors have made positive changes to the way they work. They now visit school to look at first-hand evidence related to issues raised in my last letter and in the inspection report. This work has had a direct impact on helping to improve the standards of display. Governors listened carefully to pupils' comments and acted on them, which has helped to further improve behaviour in the playground.

The original action plan has a new section added to the front, with achievement data and targets for each class. This shows that the school aspires to reach at least national averages this year, including for children entitled to the pupil premium. The plan has 'traffic lights' for actions done, started or stalled. All actions started on time.

Two new sections have been added to the end of the plan: improving writing and review of use of pupil premium by the local authority. The writing plan is thorough and detailed. First-hand evidence is used well. Pupils' books are scrutinised regularly.

External support

The local authority has made a good contribution by completing Year 6 moderation of teachers' assessment and is in the process of moderating assessment in all years. The local authority was also commissioned to carry out the review of the pupil premium. The way this has been done is strong in involving governors to build self-evaluative skills, but lacks a clear statement of evidence used and action needed. The diocesan authority has provided training on improving standards, which was well received by governors.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey
Her Majesty's Inspector