

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 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mrs Catherine Gordon
Executive Headteacher
Our Lady's RC Primary School Manchester
Whalley Road
Whalley Range
Manchester
M16 8AW

Dear Mrs Gordon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Our Lady's RC Primary School Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, three senior leaders, five members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority and the diocese. Discussions were also held with school staff and a small group of older pupils. Her Majesty's Inspector also visited each classroom to observe pupils at work. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the February inspection, the headteacher has retired and an executive headteacher has been appointed to lead the school for two and half days a week. This arrangement is set to last until March 2015. The deputy headteacher has become the head of school and the Reception teacher is acting as assistant headteacher until the end of the academic year. The Year 4 teacher is on extended leave and this class are being taught by a temporary teacher. The specialist teacher for physical education is teaching in Year 3 for part of each week. The local authority

is in the process of seeking approval for an interim executive board (IEB) to replace the existing governing body.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The special measures judgement was a surprise to staff and governors. Many are still reeling from the shock and not all agree the outcome of the inspection is a true and fair reflection of the school. Nonetheless, the executive headteacher is under no illusion that there is much to do to help the school make a speedy recovery. Since her appointment she has lost no time in rolling up her sleeves and setting about tackling the school's shortcomings. She is beginning to earn the support of other staff, who despite their disagreement with the inspection judgement, are determined to improve for the sake of the pupils in their care.

Everyone has been busy since the inspectors left the school in February. Great strides are being made in setting up essential systems so the school has the necessary foundations on which to build future success. Time and energy is being invested wisely in establishing whole-school systems for checking on pupils' progress. Teachers' skills in accurately identifying pupils' starting points and setting challenging learning goals are being updated through extensive training opportunities. As a result, teachers' planning is beginning to take greater account of the different learning needs of pupils in each class. These actions are bearing some fruit. Although the current Year 6 are likely to achieve the lowest Key Stage 2 results in the school's recent history, this is an improvement on February's data, when over half of this group were not working at the levels expected for their age.

Leaders have acted with urgency to tackle the weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements. The adults with responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable pupils have been equipped with the skills and knowledge to carry out their role. No time has been wasted in reviewing teaching and learning across the school to gain an accurate baseline of strengths and weaknesses. However, further checks on teaching lack rigour because too much is carried out informally. Consequently, teachers are not benefiting from precise targets or individual support to help them improve their teaching. Although senior leaders have an accurate view of what needs to improve, this is not making enough difference in classrooms and to teachers' marking.

Strong links are being forged with a local school and much is being done to capitalise on the support and expertise available through this partnership. For example, teachers across both schools are working together to improve planning and to develop the outside learning area for the youngest children.

The inspection findings are being used well to drive the improvement plan. It is clear the school is taking the right action. Nonetheless, the improvement plan does not provide a strong enough road map for the school's recovery because it is too short term. A lack of precise milestones means leaders and governors are not able to identify clear markers for success at key points in the journey. There is no safety net to avoid slippage and promote rapid progress.

Pupils are loyal and keen to show off the best features of their school. They are full of praise for the changes that are being made. They like the reorganisation of the school day because it gives them more time to complete work and they appreciate the opportunity to work in small groups as this enhances their concentration.

The local authority's statement of action is appropriate and includes a range of checks and balances to keep an eye on the school's progress. The local authority, in partnership with the diocese, has taken speedy and robust action to strengthen leadership through the appointment of an executive headteacher. It also intends to improve governance through the appointment of an IEB to replace the existing governing body. However, it has been less effective in helping the current governing body to raise their game while they remain responsible for the school. More time has elapsed than was expected for the new governance arrangements to be in place. This has left the current governing body in a state of limbo. Governors continue to fulfil their statutory duties, but there has been little investment in sharpening their skills. Governors are anxious to improve this state of affairs and, as a result, have enrolled on training courses. Nonetheless, there has been little headway in improving governance at this point in time.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Strategic Director of Children's and Commissioning Services for Manchester and the Director of the Diocese of Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector