

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 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

16 July 2014

Dr Helen Rudeforth, Acting headteacher
St Francis Catholic Primary School
Mill Road
Sheffield
Walsall
West Midlands
WS4 1RH

Dear Dr Rudeforth

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 July, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 newly qualified teachers into any year group 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 Archdiocese 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 third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher, other school staff, a group of pupils from the junior leadership team, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and two representatives from the local authority. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they brought their children to school, and with pupils in lessons and as they moved around the school. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the diocese.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school. Two teachers are due to go on maternity leave at the end of this term. Three teachers have been appointed and will join the school at the beginning of the autumn term. The Holte School continues to provide leadership capacity and support to improve the skills of leaders at all levels.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School records and the work in pupils' books indicate that progress for many pupils improved in the second half of the year. Some pupils caught up considerably in this short time. For example, the proportion of children working at a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year in 2013 was above the national figure. Nevertheless, national test results show that, because the starting points for many pupils were very low, standards overall remain low. For example, results for Year 6 pupils show a notable improvement in mathematics since 2013, yet the overall proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard is below the national average. Results for writing remain a long way behind those for reading and mathematics.

Some pupils are not still doing as well as the rest. Large gaps still exist for other groups. For example, Key Stage 1 assessments show that fewer than half of White British boys attained the levels expected for their age in mathematics. The figure was around a third in reading and less than a quarter in writing. In contrast, almost all the girls achieved at least the expected level in all three subjects. The school has reviewed its use of the pupil premium (additional funding from the government) to successfully help some pupils who are eligible for free school meals to make swift progress and reach standards in line with their classmates. School data show a few gaps remain for these pupils.

Pupils now have better opportunities to write. Some teachers are effectively helping pupils to apply writing skills in different subjects, such as when Year 6 pupils wrote a play script for their history topic on Ancient Greece. Teachers have focused on

improving pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills. This is having an effective impact as many pupils are now writing more accurately than previously. However, less attention has been given to presentation, and pupils' books are often still untidy, with handwriting that is sometimes difficult to read.

A recently introduced policy for teaching calculations has given clearer guidance to teachers on what skills to teach in each year group. This initiative is still being established. Pupils' books show some pupils do not securely remember basic number facts and so struggle to complete more complicated calculations correctly. Teachers sometimes do not notice this and so do not take the immediate action necessary to rectify the problem.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving well. This is because teachers and teaching assistants have conscientiously followed good-quality advice and effective training provided by the support school. For example, the acting headteacher has skilfully guided teachers on how to mark pupils' work, helping them understand how to speed up progress for different pupils, and has trained teachers and teaching assistants to use questioning effectively. Much work has been done to improve teachers' skills in judging what levels pupils are working at. This has led to work being better matched to what pupils need to learn next. In some cases, teachers still do not quite get this right. For example, some lower-ability pupils complete little work because the tasks are too difficult for them. This is occasionally also true for some more-able pupils, where teachers have raised their ambitions, but do not take assessment information into account to ensure they are realistic. Most pupils now know exactly what levels they are working at and talk confidently about what they can do to reach the next. Some are less sure because not all teachers use targets as effectively to share learning with pupils.

Teachers' use of questions has improved. Some probing questioning was observed which dug deeply into pupils' knowledge and made them use high-level reasoning skills in their replies. Such questions require pupils to think carefully before answering. Occasionally, teachers expect a response too quickly and so the benefit of such good questioning is undermined. Pupils report that lessons are generally more interesting and more challenging than previously. Most pupils observed were taking a full part in lessons and learning well. Pupils report that teachers sometimes do not ensure the entire class is involved in meaningful work throughout the whole lesson. They say that, when this happens, they can become distracted or a little bored. This was observed in some lessons.

Teachers have put a great deal of effort into improving the impact of their marking on pupils' progress. This has begun to succeed and is one reason why pupils are beginning to catch up to where they should be. Some very impressive marking in Year 6 has led to these pupils making rapid progress in the second half of the year. All teachers now give pupils very clear information about what they have done well. All now follow the system for giving guidance on how to improve (known as 'wishes')

and setting corrections or next-step tasks to help pupils rectify errors immediately or move their understanding forward (known as DINTS). In many cases, this is helping them to make good progress in several subjects. The impact of this is still variable because sometimes teachers do not ensure pupils complete DINT tasks, so improvements are not made. Occasionally, the DINT task is still not specific enough to help the pupil understand exactly how to correct the error. More generally, teachers find it difficult to set DINT tasks in a way that supports lower-ability pupils to make the same rate of progress as pupils who find learning easier.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in and out of school. The school has received praise from members of the wider community about pupils' behaviour. For example, the education coordinator of a nearby historic house wrote to the acting headteacher following a recent visit by Years 3 and 4 pupils praising their conduct and attitudes to learning. During this inspection, pupils' exemplary behaviour contributed to the smooth running of two sports days. The junior leadership team provides a strong voice for pupils. Members show great pride in their role and take the responsibility seriously.

Pupils, and parents and carers, report that individual incidents of bullying are dealt with immediately and effectively. However, they also report that the school has been less successful in preventing some pupils from carrying out further bullying.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Strong leadership from the support school has brought about clarity of purpose and a shared drive for improvement. Fundamental systems are now in place to support the school to become increasingly autonomous. Parents and carers are pleased with these changes and are right to say that the school is improving as a result of effective leadership.

The acting headteacher frequently checks the quality of teaching. Her view is accurate due to the wide range of measures she uses. For example, each week she invites a selection of pupils to join her for a tea party, during which she talks to them about their learning and looks at their books. After any monitoring activity she gives teachers very detailed notes and asks them to rectify concerns. Her records show she follows these notes up promptly to check if the improvement has been made. This is a key reason why the quality of teaching is now so much better.

Senior leaders, subject leaders, leaders responsible for different year groups and class teachers now use information about pupils' achievement to challenge themselves to do the best they can for all pupils. This is why pupils who are eligible for free school meals are catching up with their classmates. There exists a corporate determination to achieve similar success for White British boys. Leaders generate a significant amount of helpful achievement data. Some have identified that the

process would be enhanced by being more streamlined so that information is presented to staff and governors in a simplified, summary format.

The governing body is aware that the current headship arrangements, although successful, are temporary. In addition, two phase leaders (teachers who oversee pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2) are due to begin maternity leave shortly. Governors are working with the support school, the local authority and the diocese to plan a process of securing permanent headship arrangements. There is a clear plan for gradually handing over strategic control to the governing body at such a time as the school is able to sustain its own improvement. The school, itself, has put in place strategies that have ensured the transfer to new phase leaders is happening smoothly.

An external review of governance has helped governors to secure a strategic view and identify how they will move towards achieving it. Governors now have a clear understanding of the need to challenge the school and the role they need to play in school improvement. They have begun to establish stronger systems of checks and balances for ensuring statutory responsibilities are met and that they hold the school to account for pupils' achievement. The governing body has shown it is prepared to take difficult decisions to do what is right for the school, such as taking responsibility for identifying an appropriate timescale for appointing a permanent headteacher. Governors' confidence is growing. They are building the capacity to be able to take control of the school but, correctly, acknowledge they are not ready to do so at this point.

External support

Support from Holte School is having good impact on improving the quality of teaching and, consequently, pupils' achievement. The local authority completed the review of governance and, subsequently, supported the governing body to address the recommendations. This has included the identification of a new clerk. The school has valued the support given to help teachers accurately judge what levels pupils are working at. Further support is planned to help teachers better understand how to meet the needs of the most-able pupils and to support the induction of a new English subject leader. An Improvement Review Group, chaired by a senior local authority officer, meets each half term to evaluate the progress made by the school and identify further support needs. The diocese continues to provide support to help the school maintain a strong Catholic ethos and has begun to work with the governing body to plan the process for securing permanent headship arrangements.