

Serco Inspections  
Colmore Plaza  
20 Colmore Circus  
Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T:** 0121 679 9153  
**Direct email:** naik.sandhu@serco.com

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Paul Parascandolo  
Headteacher  
Our Lady of Ransom Catholic Primary School  
Little Wheatley Chase  
Rayleigh  
SS6 9EH

Dear Mr Parascandolo

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady of Ransom Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 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.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher and members of the governing body. I met with a group of Year 5 pupils to see what they think of recent changes to the marking policy. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and pupil achievement data scrutinised. We jointly observed teaching and learning in all of the classes. I looked at the school's record of the checks carried out on those who work with children.

## **Context**

There are 14 classes in total. Six new teachers started at the school in September. The deputy headteacher now has a more strategic role within the school and no longer has a class teaching responsibility. She has assumed responsibility for inclusion and for the quality of teaching. A school improvement board has been established, comprising yourself, a core group of governors and representatives of the local authority and diocese. The improvement board is intended to provide regular monitoring of the school's progress towards becoming good.

## **Main findings**

The senior leadership team has made a good start to improving the overall effectiveness of the school. The whole school community is keen to improve, as one pupil remarked 'everyone is getting stuck in'. The school's improvement plan has an explicit focus on weaknesses identified during the inspection. Each of the areas for improvement is addressed and appropriate actions identified. For many actions specific dates are identified but where this is not the case it is unclear whether dates are for starting or completion. Some actions are backed up by measurable success criteria so that governors can easily hold the school to account. While targets for pupils' attainment are sharp and explicit; those for pupils' progress are too vague.

The 2014 unvalidated test and assessment results for Year 6 pupils indicate that the school's overall attainment data is likely to be close to the national average and similar to 2013. The proportions of Year 6 pupils making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics is likely to be similar to, or above, that found nationally. The proportion making better than expected progress is likely to be close to that found nationally in reading but lower in mathematics and writing.

With such a high proportion of new staff, it is not possible to speak with confidence about whether or not the quality of teaching is improving. What is clear from discussions with pupils is that they believe that learning is more effective now than last term. They say this is in large part a result of better marking, which has a much sharper focus on how pupils can improve their work. There is a clearer expectation that they will act promptly on teachers' comments. This is usually at the start of the day, when time is set aside for pupils to respond to marking and improve their work. Pupils say that they really like the new marking strategy 'because we get to learn from our mistakes'. They are confident and articulate when explaining recent changes and their impact. A key to the marking code used by teachers is displayed in all classrooms, but not all are at a height easily read by pupils and not all pupils understand the vocabulary used. However, teachers are taking greater care to ensure that pupils know exactly what they are expected to learn and how their work will be assessed. This is particularly useful in enabling pupils to assess their own and their classmates' work and for teachers to know who needs a bit of extra support. Pupils now have smart new exercise books which are encouraging a greater sense of

pride. Pupils say this is another change for the better. While expectations for the presentation of pupils' work have risen, not all are making the effort to use rulers to draw straight lines, to form letters correctly or use joined handwriting. Where there is an explicit focus on handwriting the quality improves, but in some books this is sandwiched between much scruffier printing. There are many good quality displays around the school. These are used to demonstrate pupils' progress and exemplify high expectations. All classrooms feature displays which reflect current work and act as an additional resource for pupils. Pupils have noticed this improvement and told me about how the 'working walls' for English and mathematics help them if they are in need of inspiration.

The last inspection report asked the school to make better use of its assessments of pupils' progress in order to raise expectations. In response the school has changed the way it tracks pupils' progress so that it is clearer who is making expected or better progress and who needs extra help. This information is used to identify a focus group of pupils of all abilities whose individual needs are identified and planned for. Regular pupil progress meetings, involving senior leaders and teams of teachers monitor how well pupils are doing. Accelerating pupils' progress is now part of teachers' performance management targets.

The last inspection report commented positively on pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. This remains the case. Pupils are confident, friendly and polite. They are proud of their school and very positive about recent changes and improvements.

Governors know the school well. Changes to leadership teams and greater responsibility for subjects across year groups have resulted in a more strategic approach to monitoring the school's performance. Although still in draft form, the recent external review of governance is positive. The governing body has already begun to act on its recommendations and is keen to incorporate these into the school improvement plan.

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**

The school is working with a group of local primary schools in order to improve teaching and share best practice in the early years. The school has valued the work of the local authority adviser who is providing good support and challenge and has made some practical, really useful suggestions which have already been acted on. Governors and senior leaders have valued this external perspective on the school's progress. The school excellence commissioner has helped the school refine its improvement plan with additional support planned for later in the term. The school is part of a national project called ASPIRE which is intended to help schools become good and strengthen leadership and management.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex local authority and the Diocese of Brentwood.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**