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9 October 2014

Mrs Catherine Gordon
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 with Keith Bardon, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 October 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers 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 Interim Executive Board, the Strategic Director of Children's and Commissioning Services for Manchester and the Director of the Diocese of Salford.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that it is at least good in order to raise standards so pupils achieve well by ensuring:
 - teachers have an accurate view of what pupils already know so that they can plan work which builds on pupils' existing knowledge and skills and supports them in making rapid progress
 - that all staff in school have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve in their learning and that teachers plan activities that will challenge pupils, especially the most able
 - that feedback given to pupils in lessons and in their books evaluates their learning effectively and gives them clear guidance on how to improve
 - teachers are able to accurately identify the progress pupils make in their work and make accurate assessments about the standards they are achieving.

- Raise standards, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - providing all staff with high-quality training so that they improve their subject knowledge and have a very good understanding of how pupils progress in developing their mathematics skills
 - ensuring that pupils have regular, well-planned opportunities to use and apply their mathematics skills in a range of subjects and that the most able pupils, in particular, are challenged in their thinking
 - monitoring the quality of teaching in mathematics and assessing pupils' progress regularly so that any underperformance is quickly identified and improved upon.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management including governance, by:
 - strengthening and stabilising the leadership team so that senior and middle leaders have a clear understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities
 - ensuring that the school's evaluation of its own work is accurate and based on rigorous checking of pupils' achievement, and that leaders use this information to direct their plans for improvement more effectively
 - making effective use of assessment systems and information to monitor pupils' progress and the standards they achieve in all subjects and all classes
 - ensuring that teachers' performance-management targets are closely linked to pupils' achievement and that staff are robustly held accountable for the progress of the pupils in their classes
 - ensuring that governors are well informed about the school's performance and have the skills necessary to hold the school to account effectively
 - maintaining detailed records of behaviour incidents and analysing the results so that school leaders can identify any patterns and support pupils effectively
 - making sure that the school's website includes information about the pupil premium grant and the impact of how it is spent.

- Ensure the governing body meets statutory safeguarding requirements by making certain the designated child-protection leader attends the required training.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, senior leaders, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). They also held discussions with staff, three groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority and the diocese. Inspectors observed nine lessons alongside senior leaders. They also made shorter visits to each classroom to evaluate the quality of teaching, to look at pupils' books and to chat to pupils about their learning.

Context

Since my last monitoring inspection, the governing body has been replaced by an IEB. Two teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. One member of staff remains on extended leave. Two classes are being taught by temporary teachers. The leadership team has been restructured and a temporary assistant headteacher has taken up post. During the inspection one teacher was absent.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is beginning to improve convincingly in some areas of the school. Children in the early years continue to thrive; the results from the check on phonics (the sounds that letters make) are increasing year on year and the decline in standards at the end of Year 2 is being halted successfully. The achievement of younger pupils is back to where it used to be, matching the national average. However, Year 6 pupils fared less well. They made less than expected progress from their starting points to reach standards that are below the national average and the government's floor standards. In short, pupils started secondary school almost a year behind in their learning. These results were not a surprise. Despite many of these pupils making strong progress since April, the distance to travel was just too great. There was not enough time to close the wide gaps in pupils' learning caused by weaker teaching in the past. Although the gaps narrowed between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, this is not a cause for celebration because neither group achieved as well as they should for their age.

Almost all groups underperformed at the end of Key Stage 2. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs enjoyed more success than their peers. Standards improved for this group, although they remain below average. Fewer pupils gained the higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 when compared to all pupils nationally.

Current data paint a more positive picture. Far more pupils in Key Stage 1 and Year 6 are working at the levels expected for their age so they are on track to reach their challenging end-of-year goals. This is not true for other pupils, particularly those in Years 4 and 5. They are lagging behind by a considerable distance and the slow start some have made since September is not helping them to catch up quickly enough. The achievement of disabled pupils, pupils with special educational needs and more able pupils follows a similar pattern. In some year groups, the most able pupils are forging ahead quickly because of the challenging work they are set. However, this is not the case for all. Pupils who find learning more difficult benefit from additional support in class from teaching assistants. Older pupils in particular are making greater gains in their mathematical skills due to a carefully structured programme which is helping them to make up for lost time in the past.

Pupils' achievement in mathematics is rising and steadily becoming stronger over time. A new scheme for mathematics is revitalising pupils' learning in this subject, helping them to gain skills and knowledge quickly and explore mathematical ideas to solve problems. Whole-school initiatives, such as the weekly mathematics challenge and the mathematics assemblies, are fostering pupils' enthusiasm for mathematics. In contrast, pupils' achievement in writing is becoming a whole-school weakness. Not all pupils have the desire or opportunity to write at length, produce writing that appeals to a reader or use their writing skills in other subjects. Some pupils are living with weaknesses in their handwriting, spelling and punctuation skills which are hampering their progress.

The quality of teaching

The path to improving teaching has been neither smooth nor easy. Staff absence and the number of temporary teachers has sometimes got in the way of whole-school policies and teaching strategies being followed to the letter in all classes. Despite this barrier, teaching in some parts of the school is improving quickly. Safe and welcoming classrooms are underpinned by warm and trusting relationships. All teachers are spending time and energy overhauling their classrooms so they are attractive, uncluttered and promote learning with up-to-date resources and helpful prompts. Throughout the school, teachers are much better at promoting pupils' speaking and listening skills. This is helping pupils to think through ideas and articulate their views before putting pen to paper.

In some classes, pupils are captivated by their learning because activities are creative and grab their interest. Some teachers have increasingly high expectations of pupils, setting work that is challenging and encourages pupils to think deeply. All teachers have information about the different starting points of the pupils in their care. However, teachers are in varying stages of using this information successfully to plan and teach activities that help pupils make the progress they should over time. This is the key stumbling block which is preventing all teaching matching the best in the school. Where this is working well, pupils are flying, gaining skills and growing in confidence by the day. Elsewhere, too many pupils, particularly those who are most able, languish with tasks that are often too easy because teachers are not adapting published schemes well enough to meet pupils' different needs.

Good quality professional development means teachers can accurately check on the progress pupils are making in writing. This is not the case for other subjects and some of the tools for testing pupils' knowledge and skills in mathematics do not match the new National Curriculum which came into force in September. Teachers are striving to follow the new marking policy. Some are leading the way because the advice they give to pupils is precise and helps them rectify mistakes quickly. The feedback in other books is sometimes too vague. Occasionally, pupils' books are not marked regularly enough.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are enjoying their learning more because recent changes are helping them to get the most out of their time at school. Above average attendance rates, which are improving over time, point to their increasing desire to cross the school threshold each and every day.

Pupils behave well most of the time, showing respect and tolerance towards each other and to the adults they meet during the day. They are willing to listen, share ideas and work sensibly with their classmates. Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving. Many, even the youngest in the school, are becoming resilient learners who persevere with tasks until they achieve and enjoy success. Nonetheless, pupils' enthusiasm for learning wavers in some classrooms. They switch off quickly and become easily distracted when teaching fails to ignite their interest. Pupils' books indicate this is a typical pattern over time. Too often work is incomplete and poorly presented.

Pupils say behaviour is generally good; but not superb. This is because some pupils find it difficult to behave well all of the time. Nevertheless, they are all in favour of the new behaviour policy, which is leading to fewer incidents of disrupted learning. Pupils are becoming increasingly better at managing their own behaviour through the detention process and the 'hot spot' timetables.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher and head of school have formed a tight-knit team. They are taking decisive action to ensure all pupils have the chance to benefit from strong teaching day in and day out. They are successfully winning over a shocked staff, rebuilding confidence and unleashing hidden potential to help teachers be at the top of their game. Consequently, everyone is on board and trying their best to keep up with the pace of change. Actions taken since the inspection are beginning to yield results; achievement is improving for younger pupils, teaching is better in many classes and pupils' gains in mathematics are stronger than before. The school's action plan is now fit for purpose. It is providing a clear route towards success with appropriate activities to lift the quality of teaching further.

Both leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Their judgements ring true with inspection evidence, so they are well placed to tackle shortcomings and spread best practice. Checks on teaching are frequent and becoming increasingly effective because teachers receive precise targets to help them improve.

Teachers are benefiting from greater guidance on what they should teach and professional development which is tailored sharply to individual needs and whole-school priorities. The load is being spread more evenly as some teachers are stepping up to the mark, giving their time and energy to support their colleagues who need extra help.

The subject leaders for mathematics and English are growing in their role. Opportunities to work with other schools and external consultants mean they are becoming confident and competent in helping to raise the quality of teaching. The newly appointed senior leaders understand their role and responsibilities. They are keen and eager to make a difference, but, as they are still on the starting blocks, there is little evidence of their impact in driving improvement.

After a delayed start, members of the IEB have got to grips with school's shortcomings quickly. They are providing well-informed challenge because they have the proven skills, expertise and experience to ask searching questions and hold leaders to account for the progress the school is making. They have already engineered the plans to secure the current leadership arrangements and they are redirecting funding to ensure resources are replenished and teachers have the tools to do the job well. However, they are not digging deeply enough into data to check on the progress of different groups of pupils in all classes. They are also in the early stages of gathering their own information about the school and making sure parents are informed about how well weaknesses in teaching and achievement are being tackled. The review of governance is on the backburner now the IEB is up and running. Nevertheless, a review of pupil premium funding is still to happen.

Assessment systems are becoming much stronger. As a result, senior leaders are able to keep a close eye on pupils' progress. Nonetheless, not enough time has been spent checking the accuracy of the data to make sure all of the information is a true picture of pupils' achievement.

All incidents of poor behaviour are recorded carefully, although they are not being analysed well enough to identify typical patterns. Safeguarding is improving; staff are knowledgeable about their responsibilities and the procedures for keeping pupils safe because they are up to speed with national guidance.

External support

The local authority has lots of checks in place to ensure the school is making the most of external support and moving on with their planned actions. Senior leaders are benefiting from the advice and support of a local authority officer. Incisive reports and joint evaluation of teaching are helping to make sure senior leaders' judgements are spot on. The strong professional support provided to the IEB is helping members to get to grips with their new role quickly. The positive impact of the recent mathematics training led by an external consultant is evident in improving achievement in this subject across the school. Links with the partner school are being exploited fully to help senior leaders get up to speed with their new roles and to support all staff with planning using the updated published scheme for English.