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10 December 2014

Mr Paul Towey
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School
Sparrow Hall Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L9 6BU

Dear Mr Towey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 December 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, two governors and a representative from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. In addition, I undertook a short walk around the school accompanied by you to look at learning in lessons. During this walk, a number of pupils' reading records and books were scrutinised.

Context

There are still ongoing staffing issues in the school. Since the inspection, one member of staff has left and one teacher continues to be absent long term, with one on maternity leave. In addition, three classes are being taught by newly qualified

teachers. The school continues to be dependent on outside support, with an interim deputy headteacher and a consultant deputy assisting with the day-to-day management of the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The staff, governors and the local authority recognise and understand why the school was judged to need special measures. There is a clear understanding that a great deal of hard work is needed to ensure that the quality of education pupils receive is, at least, of a good standard. Although good intentions are clear, the pace at which improvements are being made is currently too slow and the actions being taken are not always clearly focused on direct improvements in the classroom. Staffing turbulence, including absenteeism, although improved, continues to blight progress and, as a result, improvements being initiated are very fragile. Inconsistencies across classes are still apparent.

There is emerging evidence to show that behaviour is being managed more effectively and pupils are getting fewer disruptions to their learning. Pupils observed were polite and courteous, and generally attentive in lessons. The atmosphere around the school was calm and purposeful despite the obvious distractions of the Nativity play dress rehearsals which were ongoing during the day.

Attendance, however, remains an issue and is, in fact, lower than previously. Although clear strategies to raise attendance and punctuality have been identified in the action plan, these are not being pursued rigorously enough to have had any discernible impact.

Currently, the school is very heavily reliant on outside support to maintain teaching and management structures. Although this may be essential in the short term, the school needs to become able quickly to show it can 'stand on its own two feet'. It is therefore paramount that management and staffing issues are resolved as a matter of urgency if the school is to make more rapid and sustained progress in the near future.

Only limited progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching. Systems are being put into place to monitor and record pupils' progress. This is enabling better diagnosis of pupils who are in danger of falling behind in their work and additional support to be targeted. However, as yet, this is not having a sufficient impact on raising achievement as teachers are not using this information sufficiently well to target resources and support on a day-to-day basis in lessons. There remains an over-reliance on 'booster' and intervention strategies to improve outcomes, especially in writing and mathematics. Tasks set in lessons are not always making

best use of appropriate resources to engage and stretch pupils. As a result, outcomes can be functional rather than creative. Lesson observations and monitoring of pupils' work are being conducted on a regular basis by the headteacher and senior leadership team, often assisted by the local authority advisers. These are helping to identify aspects of teaching that are weak but, as yet, there has been little direct impact on improving classroom practice. The majority of staff are new to the school and include three newly qualified teachers who need high-quality advice and support. There is little evidence to show that staff have received specific ongoing training to improve their classroom practice. Equally, there is a lack of understanding of where they can access the most appropriate resources or teaching ideas. The support and guidance provided by the various subject associations have not been utilised. In addition, little use is being made of websites such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) or the NCETM materials (the National Centre for Excellence in the teaching of Mathematics), which would enhance and improve current classroom teaching.

Subjects are taught discretely, but teachers lack the subject knowledge and confidence to teach all of these well. As a result, what pupils experience varies across classes. For example, during our walk through lessons, it was evident that some pupils are reading regularly both in school and at home, have their books changed frequently and that this is managed and monitored well. However, this practice is not consistent across the school. Some classrooms have enticing and pleasant reading corners where pupils can relax and read in comfort; others are less welcoming. The school reading scheme does not meet the needs of all learners, particularly the most able. There is no library facility to provide choice or support the development of good reading habits. It is essential that tackling this reading deficit becomes a priority and actions should be firmly grounded in improving pupils' access to high-quality books in order to engender a real love of reading.

The school action plan needs to be revised as it is too broad and generic, particularly in those sections linked to the improvement of teaching and the development of management. Clear specific and manageable actions need to be embedded, which will directly improve practice in the classroom and lead to better outcomes for pupils. There is a strong focus on monitoring lessons and tracking pupils more purposefully but little evidence as to how to improve teachers' knowledge to enable them to teach with greater confidence across the full range of subjects.

Governors are aware of the inherent weaknesses in the school and are committed to pursuing a more active approach in challenging school leaders and making them fully accountable for progress. The reconstitution of the governing body and the appointment of several new governors with appropriate skills and experience have strengthened governance and there is emerging evidence of impact. Governors are

now in a stronger position to challenge the work of the school and are determined to act on the recommendations of the imminent review of governance scheduled to take place later this week. The review of the use of the pupil premium funding (additional government money), which was recommended at the section 5 inspection, has not yet taken place.

The local authority's statement of action provides a detailed and sound framework for improvement. Extensive consultant support was already being provided before the inspection and continues to be provided currently. Links have been established with local schools to enable teachers from Our Lady and St Philomena's to observe and share good practice. A headteacher from a local good school has been appointed to mentor and advise senior leaders. Support from the local authority, in partnership with the archdiocese and governors, has been successful in dealing with a wide range of staffing and management issues.

There is a clear understanding that much still needs to change if the school is to improve. In order to ensure momentum and progress are maintained, resolving the remaining staffing issues remains a priority concern. Once this has been achieved, other improvements can be implemented more quickly and embedded more effectively.

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. It provides a broad working structure for improvement. However, some of the initiatives will have to be rationalised and basic strategies to improve teaching, learning and management need to be clarified and simplified.

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 Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Director for Children and Young People's Services for Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector