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6 March 2015

Mrs Sandra Hamilton
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Swithin's Catholic Primary School
Parkstile Lane
Liverpool
Merseyside
L11 0BQ

Dear Mrs Hamilton

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

Following my visit with Yvonne Brown, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 March 2015, 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 January 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may 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 Governing Body and the Director for Children and Young Peoples Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching to at least good, so that that all pupils achieve as well as they can, especially in writing and mathematics, by making sure that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and provide work which is at the right level of challenge for their varying abilities
 - all teachers insist that all pupils present their work to a high standard
 - marking is improved so that pupils know how to improve and are given opportunities to respond to teachers' advice and correct their mistakes
 - teachers plan lessons which are engaging and maintain pupils' interest so that their behaviour and attitudes to learning are always at least good
 - pupils have opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across different subjects
 - pupils make secure and brisk progress in spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting as a result of a frequent, specific focus on the development and assessment of these skills
 - pupils can quickly recall important number facts and use this knowledge to solve word problems successfully
 - the provision outdoors in the Early Years Foundation Stage offers children a similar range and quality of learning activities that they experience indoors.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring stable leadership of the school
 - checking the quality of teaching rigorously and holding teachers to account for pupils' achievement
 - developing the roles of middle leaders, including subject leaders, so that they have a good understanding of how well pupils achieve and how well they are taught in their areas of responsibility across the whole school
 - making sure all teachers develop skills to make an accurate assessment of how well pupils are doing
 - ensuring school staff receive more focused and specific support, relevant to their developmental needs.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 March

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and looked carefully at a cross section of pupils' work in their books. Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, other staff, groups of pupils, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, representatives of the local authority, the archdiocese and the Liverpool Learning Partnership.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the review of the pupil premium (additional government money) has taken place. One member of staff has left the school after a period of absence. During the monitoring inspection, a substantial proportion of classes were being covered by temporary teachers because of staff absence.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The Early Years Foundation Stage goes from strength to strength and is a shining example of just what can be achieved with drive, commitment and high expectations. The leader of this phase of the school is inspirational; her passion for the children's education is tangible. The Nursery and Reception areas of the school are utterly captivating. Every single resource is harnessed in such a way as to ensure children make great strides in their learning and development. As a result children are motivated and happy, engaging willingly in activities that stimulate their imagination and are well matched to their diverse needs. Since the previous monitoring inspection, work has begun on creating an improved outdoor play area. This development is very positive and is set to enhance further the excellent start these children experience to their education.

In Key Stage 1 there has been some decline in the standards pupils are achieving since the previous monitoring inspection. Teaching in Year 1 does not always build sufficiently effectively on the outstanding practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils fall back. Progress speeds up in Year 2, but there is too much ground to make up, therefore, during this inspection, inspectors found that overall progress in Key Stage 1 is not as good as it could be.

In Key Stage 2, long periods of staff absence since the previous monitoring inspection have severely blighted pupils' progress, which has declined substantially. The school has been compelled to rely on a succession of temporary teachers to replace staff who are absent, leading to a lack of consistency and impaired quality of teaching. According to assessment information provided by the school, pupils in Year 6 are currently on target to achieve well in their forthcoming SATs tests. However, during the monitoring inspection, inspectors found little to support these optimistic

predictions. These pupils have had four different teachers during this crucial year in their education. When inspectors looked at the work in their books and in lessons, it was clear that pupils' progress has been, and still is, far too slow.

The progress of pupils with special educational needs and those with disabilities remains a cause for concern in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This is not the case in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where these children achieve well. Although the school has put in place a variety of intervention strategies to help pupils with special educational needs to catch up, these have been ineffective. By the end of Year 6, these pupils are at least two years behind their peers in mathematics, reading and writing. In one Year 6 lesson, observed during the inspection, the support these pupils received was woefully wanting, leading to pupils being highly dependent on the teaching assistant and doing little for themselves.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving since the previous monitoring inspection. Gaps are narrowing between their progress and that of other pupils across the school, particularly in Year 2.

The quality of teaching

Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is of consistently high quality and, as a result, children make excellent progress. Teachers in the Nursery and Reception classes are well supported by teaching assistants, who share their high expectations and aspiration. Assessment information on children's progress is precise and well documented, giving teachers a very sharp and accurate picture regarding the children's learning and development.

The good progress that children make in phonics (the sounds that letters make) has been sustained because teaching is systematic and engaging, building successfully on what children have already learned. During this monitoring inspection, I witnessed a particularly productive phonics session, designed to support children with special educational needs, led well by a teaching assistant. Children responded with verve and delight, demonstrating a good grasp of links between sounds and letters. One child's sense of achievement was palpable, shouting out his name joyfully as he recognised the letter it begins with and he was enthusiastically congratulated by the teaching assistant and the other children.

Good teaching is evident also in Years 2 and 4, but this is not a consistent pattern across the school. During the visit almost half the permanent staff of the school were absent. A Year 5 pupil shared her frustration at this situation with an inspector during our visit, with the following comment, 'We have had five teachers this year! I am not very happy about this – we want a teacher we can keep.' From lesson observations, work scrutiny and talking to pupils during this inspection, inspectors drew the conclusion that the quality of teaching has deteriorated considerably since the previous monitoring inspection last November. This is largely because, despite

strong input, direction and monitoring by senior leaders, the erratic attendance of staff has proved a substantial barrier to sustained improvement. As a result the progress the school had made towards the removal of special measures has faltered.

The quality of marking has continued to improve overall and there is a sharper focus on correcting mistakes in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they appreciate the helpful comments they receive from teachers about their work. However, on occasion, opportunities are missed to ensure pupils act on teachers' advice or make corrections, leading to them sometimes making repeated errors.

The quality of the information that the school collects on pupils' progress has improved substantially since the previous inspection. However, this information does not analyse in sufficient depth the relative progress of different groups of pupils and sometimes school leaders struggle to identify clearly the comparative progress of pupils across the school.

The team of teaching assistants has responded reasonably well overall to the training they have received since the previous monitoring inspection. However, they are not always engaged productively in lessons and, therefore, do not always support pupils sufficiently effectively.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance continues to improve and is now in line with the national average. The learning mentor has now firmly established very productive relationships with parents and carers. They trust her and appreciate her efforts in encouraging their children to come to school.

Behaviour is good in lessons for the most part, but a little low-level disruption was observed on occasion when the teaching was unsuccessful in engaging pupils' interest. Pupils socialise well together and move around the school sensibly and courteously. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning: they are motivated, enthusiastic and proud of their school.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a strength. During this inspection, pupils showed enjoyment in celebrating World Book Day by dressing up in costumes, for example as the *Three Little Pigs*. School leaders have been very successful in instilling a strong moral sense in pupils. This was expressed well by one pupil who spoke to inspectors, explaining how the school had taught her to be 'helpful, kind and respectful'. Another child beamed as she proudly quoted the school's motto, 'love, live and learn'.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

It is saddening to see how the well-intentioned and appropriate actions taken by school leaders to drive the school forward, that had shown such promise at the previous monitoring inspection, have not managed to have a more substantial impact on securing improvement. Senior leaders' determination to eradicate inadequate teaching and sort out several ongoing staffing issues, have consumed considerable time and energy. Furthermore, the drive to improve the overall quality of teaching has been frustrated at every turn largely because the attendance of certain members of staff has been so poor. Hence the quality of teaching has dipped and, as a result, the progress of the school towards the removal of special measures has stalled.

The executive headteacher is an immense support to the school and continues to provide exceptional leadership, particularly in resolving longstanding personnel issues. However, the acting headteacher has had no one to whom she might delegate some substantial areas of responsibility. In addition to her role as acting headteacher, she is also the deputy headteacher, in charge of special educational needs and the teacher in charge of child protection. This has proved too onerous and has led to insufficient attention being paid to what is going on in the classroom. The lack of distributed leadership across the school remains an obstacle to ensuring that this school improves quickly.

The governing body has been resolute in its continued fight to improve provision for the pupils of Our Lady and St Swithin's. Governors are dedicated, determined and knowledgeable. They challenge school leaders persistently to 'raise their game'; they feel a keen sense of both frustration and disappointment that secure, sustained improvement remains elusive. The pupil premium review, recommended at the previous inspection, has been completed and this has generated a clear way forward to improve the effectiveness of the deployment of these additional funds.

Engagement with parents continues to develop positively and this is shown by the improvement in attendance. However, some parents have expressed their dissatisfaction with the number of teachers who are absent from school as they can see that this is having a deleterious impact on their children's progress. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the recent introduction of an 'APP' that parents can use to find out about their child's behaviour, progress and homework.

External support

The local authority continues to provide support and was in the middle of conducting a review of the school immediately prior to this monitoring inspection. The local authority has very recently allocated some time from human resources to support the school in addressing more swiftly the ongoing staffing issues it faces. The school

also benefits from working in partnership with other local schools, such as Croxteth Community Primary School and Hope University through the 'Hope Challenge'. School leaders have been successful in securing substantial financial support from the Liverpool Learning Partnership in order to improve the outdoor play area. The archdiocese has offered support in finding additional staffing that the school requires and this is a further extremely helpful and positive development.

Further recommendations:

- The school must urgently resolve the present, pressing staffing difficulties so that all children in all years have their own teacher, who they can rely on to provide consistently good teaching.
- School leaders must strengthen, using all the powers at their disposal, the leadership structure of the school, so that there are clear lines of accountability for key areas of the school's work, particularly for the strategic leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs.