

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment
Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566857

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jkinsman@cfbt.com



30 April 2015

Mr Neil Gurnan
Headteacher
St John Southworth Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson
Lomeshaye Road
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 0DQ

Dear Mr Gurnan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Southworth Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 29 April 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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. The school should take further action to:

- develop the governing body's capacity to hold senior leaders to account for the impact of their actions beyond that of the school effectiveness committee.
- ensure that the non negotiables regarding the teaching of literacy are apparent in every classroom and every teacher's practice.
- develop leaders' tracking of the impact of intervention activities on the learning of key groups of pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors, including the Acting Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the diocese and two representatives of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan and other documents relating to school improvement were evaluated. During the inspection the inspector accompanied the headteacher on visits to all classes to see the school at work and look at the impact of leaders' actions.

Context

The substantive headteacher at the last inspection has left the school. An acting headteacher was appointed in December 2014 but has also left. You were appointed as acting headteacher in February 2015 and have been contracted to lead the school until summer 2016. The school's deputy headteacher has returned from a period of absence and an associate deputy headteacher has temporarily joined the staff until August 2015. A class teacher is taking maternity leave. An Acting Chair of the Governing Body has taken up post, from within the newly reconstituted governing body, due to temporary absence of the Chair of the Governing Body.

Main findings

Governance has improved. The governing body is now leaner and sharper. The governing body's school effectiveness committee is effective in holding leaders to account through a range of strategies that allow them to check the information they receive. This includes the analysis of data and visits to school to check with subject leaders and class teachers. However, not all governors are part of this committee and it is recognised that further development of the whole governing body to allow it to hold leaders to account is a priority. Actions by the governing body to arrest the decline in the rate of progress the school was making, due to turbulence in stability and quality of leadership, have been effective. Leadership has been secured and stabilised for the immediate future through your appointment as the new acting headteacher. You demonstrate a clear vision and an ability to effectively plan and prioritise the actions needed to help improve the school. This is a significant positive step for the school as stability of staffing, and leadership in particular, will be crucial if it is to succeed on its journey to be judged good at the next inspection.

The leadership team has been substantially strengthened through the appointment of you and the associate deputy headteacher; both of you have skills and abilities that complement effective elements already in place in middle leadership in the school. Consequently the senior leadership team has a renewed vigour to move forward and succeed in improving the school while also being very aware of the challenges you still face. Staff also recognise this improvement and are vocal in their support for the new leadership to help bring about the needed improvements.

You have taken immediate action to secure the safety and safeguarding of pupils and staff. A recently-erected fence eliminates the dangers posed to pupils by their previously free access to the school's car park and the busy road running alongside it. The formal training staff have received and the appropriate risk assessments and policies you have established mean they can now use safely the high level storage areas in Key Stage 2. You have re-established safeguarding training for all staff as an annual event; this has resulted in an improved response in the event of children raising safeguarding issues. Concerns are reported more quickly and evidence is recorded more accurately to help ensure children remain safe.

Teaching is improving because you and other leaders have prioritised and shared appropriate areas for improvement and associated expectations. Consequently training is more focussed and teachers have a better understanding of what needs to improve and how to do it. Non-negotiables and high expectations have been set, particularly with regard to the teaching of literacy across the school, but these are not yet consistently applied in all classes. In some classes there are examples of displays that contain spelling mistakes or the improper use of Standard English, while in others the activities set for pupils do not always have a sharp enough focus on learning, particularly in reading. Pupils' writing is getting better because it has been made a whole school priority and all staff now recognise its importance. Writing is celebrated across the school in displays and working walls. These displays should however, be further improved so as to identify for pupils the particular reasons why their writing is celebrated. Marking continues to improve because of leaders' clear insistence on heightened expectations. This has resulted in better marking in most English and mathematics books but is not yet consistently across all classes and in all subjects.

The tracking of pupils' progress and attainment by leaders continue to be a strength of the school and its use by teaching staff continues to improve. Data is shared and now more regularly used by teachers to help them identify pupils' needs and plan work that is appropriately challenging. Teachers are held more regularly to account by senior leaders for the progress pupils make and any underperformance is robustly challenged. Tracking systems should, however, be further developed to allow leaders to evaluate the impact of the many intervention activities that are used to support key groups of pupils in the school, including the most able and those who speak English as an additional language.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has drawn well on external support including the use of school-to-school support to give opportunities for teachers to see good practice in other schools and to enable governors to share training on common themes.

The local authority and diocese have worked as a very effective partnership to support governors and leaders, particularly in aiding their response to the period of turbulence in leadership. Additionally, training and support given to teachers by local authority consultants has equipped them with strategies and skills to improve their teaching of both mathematics and English. This support is now, quite rightly, being reduced to allow teachers to focus on the implementation of their new skills and strategies.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire and the Director of Education for the Catholic Diocese of Salford.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon

Her Majesty's Inspector