

Tribal
Kings Orchard
1 Queens Street
Bristol, BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 311 5307
Email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com



10 June 2015

Jane Smith
Headteacher
St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School
Magdalen Road
St Leonards-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN37 6EU

Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 June 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 November 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 section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen leaders' focus on pupils' progress when checking teaching, particularly the progress of pupils at risk of not achieving national expectations when aged 7 or 11
- rationalise the school's improvement plans to show clearly the specific improvements required, with precise actions, responsibilities and timescales in every case, and how governors will measure success
- further develop the school's approach to assessing pupils' progress, to enable appropriate checks on the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and others who may make frequent, small steps of progress.

The local authority should take further action to:

- arrange partnership for leaders and teachers with a school which has a proven track record of success
- support governors in holding the headteacher to account for the improvement of the school, including through meetings and governors' efficient use of information about pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the senior leadership team, and toured the school visiting all the classrooms. I spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I considered a range of documents including the school's improvement plans, records of leaders' checks on teaching and pupils' work, and notes of leaders' meetings. I examined information about pupils' achievement and local authority reports.

Context

There have been no staff changes since my last visit to the school.

Main findings

Working closely with the local authority, you have continued to raise the quality of teaching, sensibly focusing on the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection report. As a result pupils' achievement is improving, with increasing proportions of pupils throughout the school now on track to achieve national expectations when they reach the age of 7 or 11.

When leaders check teaching you now provide a detailed template to ensure all involved consider in detail whether the approaches you promote are implemented consistently by staff. Importantly, you also ensure that pupils' work, and their views about their learning are considered. However, these checks still do not consider sufficiently, how well pupils progress during lessons, especially identified vulnerable groups or individuals, including the most able and those with special educational needs.

In Reception, a significantly higher proportion of children are on track to achieve a good level of development before they move on to Year 1 compared with previous years. This is due to teachers' more effective assessment of children's progress, better planning for their next steps, and the improved range and quality of activities offered.

You have recently introduced valid new methods for assessing and recording pupils' achievement, aligning the school's approach to the revised National Curriculum. The new system is beginning to provide more detailed and helpful information, especially

about the progress of different groups and individuals. It is good to see that you discuss this information regularly with teachers, other leaders in the school and the local authority. You expect teachers to refer to this information when planning future learning for their pupils, but do not look closely enough for better progress as a result, when you check teaching.

You recognise the need to establish more fully the way teachers and leaders use the new assessment system. Currently you are not checking, as you should, to see whether pupils supported by the pupil premium are on track to achieve as well as other pupils do nationally when they are aged 11 (the pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be entitled to free school meals and those who are looked after). Furthermore, the new assessment system does not currently enable staff to measure the necessary small steps some pupils make in their learning. Importantly, this applies to pupils with special educational needs, and some who are acquiring English as an additional language, many of whom are supported by the pupil premium.

You have sharpened the school's improvement plan and this now refers directly to all the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection report. Unfortunately, the revision of the plan has resulted in a lengthy document including a range of different formats. As a result, timescales, responsibilities, and governors' role in checking improvement are still unclear in some sections. I am pleased that mathematics and English subject leaders have contributed their own action plans. However, while listing useful activities, these leaders have not set out clearly enough the improvement in teaching or learning they aim to achieve.

Governors have responded actively to a review of their work, devising a pertinent action plan. Recent recruitment has added to the range of skills and experience in the governing body, and governors are being conscientious in undertaking relevant training. Governors' visits to the school are increasingly purposeful, and individual responsibilities are now clear. Regular attendance at senior leaders' meetings is improving governors' knowledge, although governors have yet to make clear to leaders exactly what information they wish to receive, including about pupils' progress, in order to check the school's improvement.

External support

Leaders value the support and challenge of local authority consultants, rightly linking this with significant improvements, especially in Reception class. Although local authority consultants are also helping the school to improve teaching and leadership in other areas, the time given is more limited. Sensibly, the local authority is therefore considering additional avenues for support including from external consultants and through links with a good school. The local authority provided the valuable review of governance, and senior consultants continue to work regularly with the headteacher, helpfully reviewing the leadership of improvement work. The diocese recently supported the school to check the quality of religious education,

and made available to the Chair of the Governing Body sound advice from another experienced chair of governors.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector