

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 566850

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: dmccarrick@cfbt.com



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Mrs Michelle Lenihan
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Paul's Roman Catholic Primary School, Heywood
Sutherland Road
Darnhill
Heywood
Lancashire
OL10 3PD

Dear Mrs Lenihan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady and St Paul's Roman Catholic Primary School, Heywood, Rochdale

Following my visit to your school on 8 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement in March 2015. 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:

- sharpen the school development plan, so that attainment and progress targets are clarified for the key groups of pupils in the school
- make sure that the actions being taken by you and your colleagues to improve the school have well-defined time scales
- clarify the order of the improvement priorities in the development plan so it is clear which are the most important and should be done first, in order to accelerate the pace of change
- ensure that senior leaders' monitoring of the work of the school leads to a meticulous evaluation of its impact.

Evidence

During my visit I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a group of middle leaders and representatives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford and Rochdale local authority. I met with a group of charming and well-mannered Year 5 pupils who eagerly shared with me their ideas about the school and commented on teachers' marking in their books. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, making short visits to classrooms where we observed pupils undertaking a range of activities related to developing their writing. I scrutinised a number of documents including the school development plan, the local authority bespoke action plan, written in response to the inspection findings, data on pupils' attainment and progress and the minutes of the latest meeting of the governors' monitoring committee.

Context

Since the inspection you have returned to your post after a period of absence. Two teachers are taking maternity leave and the Year 1 teacher has left the school. The resulting vacancy is currently being covered by the deputy headteacher.

Main findings

All the key stakeholders I met accept the findings of the previous inspection and are using them as a firm foundation on which to build an improving school.

Senior leaders are taking a pragmatic approach to addressing the key improvement priorities identified by inspectors. To tackle issues related to the teaching of phonics (a method of teaching reading based on the sounds that letters and groups of letters make) and weaknesses in boys spelling, senior leaders have purchased a published scheme and trained staff in its use to bring consistency to the way these aspects of literacy are taught across the school. The school report some early and encouraging signs of the positive impact that this scheme is having on pupils' outcomes. For example, the school presented data indicating that in the Early Years and Foundation Stage children's progress in phonics is beginning to accelerate. In addition, the Year 5 pupils I spoke with said that their daily phonics' sessions are having a positive impact on the quality of their spelling. However, it is early days and consequently it is too soon to gauge the impact of this programme on pupils' performance overall.

Teachers' lesson planning has been sharpened to provide a clearer focus to the teaching of writing and, in particular making sure that the development of ideas and skills follows a logical order. Although these plans are in place and are being used by teachers to guide their professional practice, it is too early to assess the impact that these changes are having on pupils' outcomes in this aspect of literacy.

Since the inspection, the role of middle leaders has been widened to embrace developing good practice within their areas of responsibility. This includes middle

leaders holding weekly meetings with colleagues to share ideas about what works best in the classroom. The minutes of these meetings are then shared with senior leaders. However, middle leaders do not follow up these meetings, for example, by observing their colleagues at work to confirm that these practices are having the desired impact. Further, although senior leaders carry out learning walks, visiting classrooms to observe teachers at work, the findings of these monitoring activities are not, currently, fed back to individual teachers. Consequently, opportunities to affirm good practice and highlight areas for further development are being missed.

Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of teachers' marking is showing signs of impact. Teachers' use of different coloured pens enables pupils to distinguish between those aspects of their work that have been done well and those aspects that require improvement. Where marking is most effective, pupils act on their teachers' advice, make the necessary changes and as a consequence accelerate their progress. However, as you are aware from your own scrutiny of pupils' work, not all marking is yet of this quality and inconsistencies remain.

The school development plan has been re-written in response to the findings of the previous inspection and as a result focuses on the actions that you and your colleagues are taking to improve the school. The document is detailed, providing a route map for colleagues to follow on the school's journey to good. However, it could be sharper. The targets for pupils' end of key stage attainment and progress measures are expressed as headline figures rather than being broken down into performance indicators for the different groups of pupils in the school. Consequently, senior leaders and governors do not have a yard stick to measure, for example, the progress that boys are making in writing, which was an area of concern highlighted at the previous inspection. Further, some of the time-scales in the plan could be clearer, with each action having a definite start and end date. This will enable stakeholders to assess the manageability of the plan, clarify the sequence of the actions being taken to improve the school and, as a consequence, their order of importance.

The governors have constituted a monitoring group with the intention of overseeing the progress that you and your colleagues are making against each of the priorities in the school development plan. However, the minutes of the most recent monitoring group meeting list the actions being taken to improve the school with little evidence that the impact of these actions has been considered.

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 local authority and diocese have provided senior leaders with effective support to help improve the school. The local authority school improvement officer has agreed with governors a bespoke action plan, which details the activities to be undertaken, with senior leaders, to accelerate the pace of change. The diocesan education adviser has brokered a link with a local leader of education who is the headteacher of a nearby outstanding primary school. The intention being to boost leadership capacity at Our Lady and St Paul's and provide additional impetus to senior leaders' work in delivering the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector