

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



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Mrs Jane Chambers
Executive Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
Springfield Road
Wigan
Lancashire
WN6 7RH

Dear Mrs Chambers

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Simon Bramwell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 June 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 and the deputy headteacher gave during the inspection and for the time you both 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 September 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not 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, the Interim Director of Children's Services for Wigan and the Diocese of Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so that it leads to pupils making at least good progress and raises standards for all pupils, especially the most able pupils, those with special educational needs, and disadvantaged pupils, as well as improving their attitudes to their work by:
 - making sure that basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, especially in number use, spelling, punctuation and grammar, are built on from the beginning of Key Stage 1 and are practised in subjects across the school
 - ensuring that teachers know and teach a range of subjects well, using their subject knowledge and knowledge of pupils' learning to plan work for pupils that matches their abilities and their interests
 - deploying teaching assistants effectively by making sure they are clear about what they are expected to do to meet pupils' specific learning needs
 - using accurate and reliable assessment information to help support and target all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, to make up for any gaps in their knowledge and skills
 - ensuring that day-to-day marking clearly guides pupils in their next steps of learning and checks on improvements in their work
 - ensuring that teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve and set work that challenges and engages all groups of pupils in their learning in order to eradicate low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - making sure that weaknesses in teaching are eradicated and that leaders' evaluations of teaching over time through observations of lessons, reviews of pupils' work in their books and checks on pupils' progress, are accurate and include all groups of pupils
 - ensuring that all staff work to realise the school's challenging targets, basing these on accurate assessment information, so that all pupils make at least good progress and reach standards that are above average in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, especially those with special educational needs, the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that pupils' work is checked systematically and accurately by staff and leaders so that any under-achievement can be acted upon and more challenging targets then set for those who achieve their targets
 - raising the levels of staff attendance
 - ensuring that the governing body is knowledgeable about the school's performance and challenges its effectiveness.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They held meetings with the executive headteacher and the deputy headteacher. They also held meetings with the leaders who have responsibility for pupils with special educational needs, the early years, mathematics and English and a group of four teachers, two of whom are newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors met formally with three groups of 10 pupils and spoke to pupils during the school day. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors; a representative of the local authority and an officer from the archdiocese. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons; all lesson observations were conducted jointly with either the executive headteacher or the deputy headteacher. Together, inspectors and leaders then discussed the practice observed on these visits to lessons. An inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' books jointly with the deputy headteacher and inspectors examined other books during visits to lessons.

On day 1 of the inspection, pupils in Year 6 and those in the Reception class were out of school on a visit to a farm. On day 2, pupils in Year 6 were out of school experiencing a transition day with the high school.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in February two teachers have left the school. A teaching assistant has joined the school. The governing body has undergone reconstitution and appointed two new members to the vacancies.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils at Sacred Heart are enthusiastic and want to learn. They have ambition and understand that to reach their goal they must work hard. Attitudes to learning are much improved. Pupils know their motto: PROUD (Proud, Resilient, Openness, Uniqueness, Demonstrating faith) and describe their classmates as having resilience, being friendly and helping each other. Inspectors observed pupils who were mostly interested in their learning, were concentrating and showing resilience when faced with a challenge. For example, a pupil in Year 2 was solving problems which involved much reading, deciding which operation to use and then working out the answer. She knew her first calculation was not correct but resolutely retraced her steps until she got the right answer. Similarly in an English lesson in Year 3, pupils were seen to find and highlight vocabulary from a given text which they used to write the opening sentences to a piece of writing about travelling. Where younger pupils particularly show resilience and hard work is during the newly introduced lessons on reading and phonics (the sounds that letters make). The strong subject knowledge of adults, the right match of learning to abilities of children and pupils, and the use of signs rather than verbal commands maintain pupils' attention so that they make swift progress and learn well in these sessions.

English books show that pupils in Year 1 to 6 are making at least expected progress with many making better than expected progress. Examples of extended writing show how pupils are using their learning about the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar to produce interesting pieces of work. It is vital that more pupils make better than expected progress so that they can make up for weak learning in the past and start to achieve well. Pupils' progress in mathematics lags behind that in English. There is a focus on repeating work on the same examples so that a pupil is still working at a concept they have already grasped. Such pupils would benefit from receiving feedback which challenges them to use their knowledge and skills to expand their learning. Appropriate resources available for pupils to use as they work out problems would significantly support this deeper understanding. The focus on improving pupils' mental mathematics skills through repetition and practice of multiplication tables is having a positive effect. Inspectors asked three groups of pupils a variety of multiplication problems. It was evident that the most able pupils could answer rapidly and correctly while other groups were less confident. Again, it is vital for pupils to know their multiplication tables so that they have the skills to solve a problem quickly.

Pupils enjoy reading and can talk about a variety of authors they enjoy, especially the most-able pupils. The well-stocked, attractively presented libraries are inviting and act as a stimulus for pupils to read more. Pupils are happy with the new literacy programmes. The plentiful text books and reading books which support these initiatives ensure that pupils are given high quality resources from which to work. This is not yet the case in mathematics where there is an over-reliance on work sheets which restricts pupils' chances to work things out for themselves. Not all pupils know what to do once they have completed the worksheet. This means that they do not know the sequence of their learning and significant learning time is lost.

The school's information on pupils' achievement shows that standards in reading, writing and mathematics for the current Year 6 are nearer the average, with disadvantaged pupils making gains in progress. Despite this, for other pupils, progress is variable across subjects, across year groups and for particular groups of pupils.

The quality of teaching

Staff are totally committed to accelerating pupils' progress and raising standards for all groups of pupils. Morale is high. Teachers and teaching assistants comment on the openness, honesty, support and clarity of expectation which now exists in the school. Teachers have risen to the increased challenge provided by leaders. Teachers contribute to, and learn from, training and other activities designed to improve teaching. Through training for whole staff and for individuals, teachers have improved their subject knowledge, especially in reading and writing, so that they feel more competent. Through work within school and with their link school to check pupils' work, teachers understand how to assess work more effectively. Teachers know the stage at which pupils are working at as the assessment of pupils' achievement is now more accurate. Activities are planned in sequence so that new

learning builds on prior learning and increasingly matches pupils' abilities and interests. Teachers know their pupils. Through this knowledge and the consistent use of the behaviour policy learning generally takes place smoothly. However, where teachers' subject knowledge is lacking or they have not planned the lesson well enough pupils get bored, their attention wanders and they lose learning time.

Teachers would benefit from more training in the teaching of mathematics and leaders recognise this and have plans in place. Although teachers have guidelines to help them teach this subject, it is clear from observing pupils that a review is necessary to provide the same structure and sequence of progression as the English programmes. For example, when a pupil worked out a calculation by using subtraction she was unable to check her answer quickly by using the inverse method of addition. This level of understanding will support quicker progress for pupils.

The quality of work from teaching assistants has undergone a 'sea change'. Teaching assistants feel valued, important, involved and know they contribute to pupils' learning. A review of the hours they work and the role they perform has resulted in their attendance at staff training which they have relished. Teaching assistants are allocated to support pupils based on the recognition of their specific skill and the need of the pupil. This means that they support all groups of pupils. Teaching assistants are now involved in the pupil progress meetings held between teachers and leaders and so bring another view of pupils' learning to the discussion. Consequently, there is a rich check on pupils' progress so that any underachievement can be identified quickly and support programmes organised.

Marking is getting better and teachers are using the new guidelines to guide their work. Pupils understand the marking system and can talk about what the different coloured pens used by teachers mean. Despite this, there is inconsistency across the school; some pupils receive comments which tell them how to improve their work and are given examples to challenge their thinking, while others do not.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are welcoming, polite and well mannered. Pupils were very happy and comfortable talking to inspectors and confidently expressed their views of the school. They are very appreciative of the changes that have been made since the executive headteacher started at the school. Similarly, parents inspectors spoke with and an evaluation of the school's parents' survey reflect this positive view. During this inspection, pupils around the school and in classrooms were generally calm and well behaved. Pupils appreciate the rewards for behaving well and feel the management of behaviour is fair as they can receive awards for more than academic success. They know the consequences if behaviour goes wrong.

Pupils feel that there is some bullying but that it is dealt with well and those spoken with know they can go to an adult to share any worries. The 'worry box' has added another level at which they can raise any anxieties and several commented that teacher protect their privacy when sorting out any of these issues. Although pupils

described opportunities to take responsibility, for example by taking the register to the office, there is an opportunity for pupils to be more involved in the running of the school. Pupils mentioned the school council but were unsure whether it was still in operation. Although pupils commented favourably about the playground, older ones felt that the Year 6 pupils sometimes dominated the playground through playing football. It may be worth leaders asking pupils to plan how they would want the playground reorganised. Pupils also feel that there are some instances of derogatory name calling which is sorted by staff but can still continue.

Some elements of misbehaviour are recorded but leaders do not have a system for collating this information. Consequently, leaders are unable to follow through any incident so that trends can be noticed and support can be given to pupils.

Action to improve attendance has resulted in some overall improvement. Nevertheless, absence for some groups of pupils is still higher than it should be. Leaders have already taken action to remedy this so that pupils do not miss learning and underachieve in the future.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the executive headteacher has resulted in creating a strong culture of teamwork, honesty, challenge and support. She is well respected by the staff, parents and pupils. She has led the improvement seen this year by keeping a focus on improving the quality of teaching through care and consideration. Using the better practice in the school and the skills of the staff from her own school she has modelled how to use challenge and support to the best effect. Through monitoring and coaching techniques, teachers are more confident and competent in teaching particular subjects and keen to get better. Together with the governors she has not shied away from determined and rigorous action when needed.

The deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and leaders of English and mathematics have all received training for their roles. They now know what action needs to be taken to improve the performance of the school and how to make it happen. Leaders have come a long way since the inspection but they realise that there is still work to do. The momentum of evaluating the impact of action taken sharply and swiftly must not be permitted to wane.

Vital systems and processes are now in place. The executive headteacher has set expectations and clear parameters for improvement but has ensured that ownership remains with each member of staff. The cycle for setting teachers' targets, observing class practice and providing packages of training to improve the quality of teaching is well established. An analysis of pupils' progress and scrutiny of their workbooks supplements the observation of practice so that teachers are in no doubt where the focus for raising pupils' achievement lies.

The special educational needs coordinator has reviewed the process for identification of pupils with special educational needs. She has established those with a genuine

need rather than those pupils who were underachieving because of weak teaching in the past. Although this information needs a little more attention, she can match support programmes to pupils' needs far more effectively. The next stage is to introduce a systematic process for checking the quality of this provision and the impact it is having on pupils' achievement.

The development of middle leaders is at an early stage. Leaders plan to review the curriculum and develop it around the newly introduced English programme. Once this has taken place, the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders to lead each subject will be reviewed.

Through robust use of local authority guidance for staff attendance, staff are more responsible in informing the school of any absence and take less time off work.

Governance is much improved. Governors have responded to the various reviews and have an action plan to guide their work. The reconstitution is complete and vacancies have been filled. Members have reviewed the committee structure and take part in training. For example, before each full governing body meeting governors receive a training package to sharpen their skills and increase their knowledge of the work of the school. Through visiting the school, meeting with staff and attending school events, members have a growing knowledge of the school. In this way they are in a better position to challenge leaders for their decisions. Governors realise that there is still work to be done to make sure that pupils are making the gains they need to reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Additionally, they know that they need to evaluate the extra support provided for disadvantaged pupils to make sure they are doing as well as possible.

Leaders' programmes of training for staff and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the success of these programmes have led to better teaching. It is essential that this improved practice converts to consistently good progress for pupils so that standards can rise in reading, writing and mathematics for all groups of pupils as swiftly as possible.

External support

The local authority provides effective support to the school. Officers monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making against the inspection recommendations. The local authority and the archdiocese were instrumental in the appointment of the new headteacher.