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10 July 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 to your school on 8 and 9 July 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 fourth 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 making reasonable 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, Children and Young People's Service 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 8 to 9 July 2015

Evidence

During the monitoring inspection, I observed the school's work and studied documentation, including information on safeguarding and the most recent review of the school conducted by the local authority in June 2015. I met with the current executive headteacher and the executive headteacher designate, who is headteacher of a local primary school. I also held meetings with representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese, the Chair and other members of the Governing Body and staff. I had a number of informal conversations with pupils and listened to some children read in the early years. In addition, I conducted several learning walks and observed teaching in the Reception Year and Years 1, 2, 3 and 5.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a number of personnel issues have been resolved. The current executive headteacher will withdraw from the school at the end of this term. The local authority and the archdiocese have brokered support for the next two years from the headteacher of All Saints' Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, which has very recently been judged outstanding by Ofsted. He will act as executive headteacher. Furthermore, the assistant headteacher from All Saints has been supporting the school during the summer term. The acting headteacher at the time of the previous monitoring inspection has been appointed as head of school. The leadership team has been strengthened further by an additional assistant headteacher, who has been seconded from Belle Vale Community Primary School. A special educational needs coordinator has been appointed in the initial instance for one year. The teaching team has been increased in order to improve the quality of teaching and ensure all classes have their own teacher. The assistant headteacher has been released from her responsibilities as a class teacher, with effect from September 2015, so that she has more time to concentrate on her leadership role.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The early years continues to shine like a beacon for the school; this area has the feel of a 'university for children'. Intellectual challenge abounds, books are everywhere and every opportunity is taken to stimulate children's imagination and develop their learning.

The leadership of, and teaching in, the early years remain characterised by high expectations. Planning for learning is detailed and teaching assistants are given specific and well-focused targets for individual children. As a result, although many children enter the Nursery class with low levels of development, all children continue to make substantial progress, whatever their individual starting points.

The outdoor space has been developed with flair and is now fully functional; it provides a safe and inviting area for children to explore and play. It was a delight during the visit to see so many children amusing themselves riding tricycles in the fresh air and enjoying the adventure of climbing through the 'Hobbit Tunnel'. It is a credit to all involved that this project has been seen so successfully to fruition.

In Key Stage 1, achievement has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Weak teaching has been eradicated; as a result, pupils across this key stage now make better progress, particularly in mathematics. However, pupils' progress in writing remains below the national average and below the school's own targets, largely because the teaching of writing has been so poor in the past and there is much ground to make up. Pupils continue to achieve well in the phonics (the sounds that letters make) screening test because they get such a strong head start in the early years.

In Key Stage 2, most of the staffing problems have been resolved and the quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last monitoring inspection. As a result, there is now an established trajectory of improved achievement since the previous inspection. The standard assessment tests (SATs) results for Year 6 demonstrate that pupils are now making much better progress. Results in the spelling, punctuation and grammar test are also much improved on those of 2014.

The gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers have narrowed considerably but boys still trail behind girls, particularly in writing. The progress of pupils with special educational needs remains a cause for concern. However, the recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has a good grasp of the principal barriers to improvement and has devised a comprehensive action plan for the development of this area of the school's provision.

The special educational needs coordinator has also produced guidance for teachers to support the learning of pupils who enter the school and speak English as an additional language. This is a promising and timely development which should better equip teachers to address the additional learning needs of such pupils.

The most able pupils are starting to make much better progress across all key stages because teaching is of better quality; for example, for the first time in the school's history, the most able pupils in Year 6 gained Level 6 in mathematics in the SATs and also in the spelling, punctuation and grammar test.

The quality of teaching

The school now has the full complement of teaching staff for the next academic year. Newly-appointed staff have provided a much needed stimulus and reinvigorated teaching. It is almost as if the school has emerged, blinking, into the

light, after the dark days in the wake of the initial judgement of special measures; teaching now crackles with ambition, enthusiasm and high expectations.

Senior leaders' relentless drive to weed out weak teaching led to some turbulence, which blighted the overall quality of teaching. This has now ceased and there is a fully qualified and long-term teacher allocated to each class. It has been some time since this was the case and pupils had become acquainted with short-term solutions to staffing issues. During the recent local authority review, when pupils were asked what would make their school better, one pupil answered pitifully, 'Just one teacher a year, please.' It is a tribute to senior leaders that they have acted so speedily in response to the recommendation at my previous monitoring inspection that they ensure all children in all years have their own teacher.

During this visit, I observed many rich and exciting activities that had been planned carefully to move pupils' learning on. For example, in Year 5, pupils worked highly cooperatively on a science investigation that demanded concentration and stimulated inquiry. In a joint lesson with Years 1 and 2, pupils listened keenly to their teachers, who were dressed up as 'Batman' and 'Flash Gordon', and there was a discernible buzz of excitement as pupils wrote down questions, with accurate spelling and punctuation, to ask their 'special visitors'. In the Reception class, a phonics session with the less able children was particularly effective because the teacher had provided small objects that the children enjoyed touching to remind them of the words that they could write. During the inspection, I heard pupils singing tunefully as they walked along the corridors, witnessed pupils enjoying a dancing lesson in the outdoor quadrangle and pupils spoke proudly to me of their achievements.

The deployment of teaching assistants remains a weakness across the school, apart from in the early years. Despite substantial training, most teaching assistants have failed to step up to the mark. Too little time is devoted to joint planning between teachers and teaching assistants. Teaching assistants receive insufficient direction from teachers and, therefore, they do not always seem clear as to how to help pupils effectively. As a result, senior leaders are in the process of restructuring the support team and have set out higher expectations for this group of staff.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Instability in staffing has had a somewhat deleterious impact on overall behaviour because the management of poor behaviour has for some time not always been approached in a consistent fashion. Senior leaders recognise that this is an area for development and the establishment of a stable team of teachers provides the opportunity for improvement in this regard.

Attendance has stabilised to be around the national average. However, rates of persistent absence are still too high and the school is exploring more effective ways to deal with this issue. Parents are not always helpful to the school in this respect;

too many take their children on holidays in school time, despite the fact that school leaders do not authorise such absence, and too many families allow their children to stay off for spurious reasons. In this way, a small minority of parents are not supporting their child's academic progress.

The school works effectively to keep pupils safe. All staff have had recent and appropriate training in safeguarding. Overall, procedures for safeguarding meet requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, I found that senior leaders in the school were overstretched and I recommended that urgent steps be taken to strengthen the leadership team. This recommendation has been acted upon promptly and there is now much more capacity at leadership level.

The current executive headteacher has had immeasurable impact in turning the tide of complacent underperformance that has plagued the school for far too long. His work has been greatly appreciated by all involved in the drive to improve this school. Nevertheless, a very promising replacement has been found. The new executive headteacher brings his expertise and knowledge of outstanding practice to the service of the school. He has a clear grasp of the school's remaining priorities for development.

Leadership responsibilities have been redistributed. As a result, the head of school has had much more time to devote to improving the overall quality of teaching. This is her forte and there is already evidence of the impact of her excellent work in this regard; teachers have raised their game, lessons are more effective and the quality of marking continues to improve.

The governing body remains a passionate and knowledgeable group of dedicated individuals that has grown in confidence since the previous inspection. Governors are now well used to holding staff to account and their success in so doing has emboldened them. They are prepared to leave no stone unturned in their drive, not only to remove the stigma of special measures, but also to develop into an outstanding school.

External support

The school continues to benefit from a wide range of external support. The local authority has maintained its robust focus on improving this school. Regular reviews and frequent meetings have been very helpful to the school in defining priorities for further improvement. In addition, the support of the local authority in tackling staffing issues has been an unqualified success. The concerted effort on the part of the local authority and the archdiocese in brokering support from All Saints' Catholic

Voluntary Aided Primary School has been very helpful and this initiative promises to be immensely beneficial. The Liverpool Learning Partnership has provided much needed financial support that has enabled the outdoor space to be completed and additional staff to be appointed. The head of school has valued particularly the mentoring she has received from the headteacher of Croxteth Community Primary School. The school has also worked effectively with Hope University on the Hope Challenge Project.