

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



4 December 2015

Mr Robert Andrew
Headteacher
St James' Church of England Primary School
Crossfield Road
Wardle
Rochdale
Lancashire
OL12 9JW

Dear Mr Andrew

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 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 June 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, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, members of the senior leadership team and the school's business manager in order to ensure that the single central record of the checks made on the suitability of adults to work with children and young people meets statutory requirements. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the school's literacy team. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Manchester. I scrutinised the quality of pupils' writing and the impact of teachers' marking in a sample of pupils' books. I held a discussion with a group of charming and articulate Year 5 pupils who shared with me their views and opinions. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, where we visited each class

and I had the opportunity to observe your colleagues and the pupils at work. I examined the school improvement plan, senior leaders' records of the monitoring of teaching, the minutes of governing body meetings held since the previous inspection and I evaluated the school's website.

Context

You and the deputy headteacher took up your substantive posts at the start of the academic year, the previous headteacher and deputy headteacher having retired at the end of the summer term. One member of staff has increased her hours to cover the responsibilities of a part-time teacher who has left the school. Governors have given additional responsibility to two members of staff to develop pupils' literacy across the school. Since the previous inspection, school governance has been reviewed.

Main findings

You bring, to your role of headteacher, determination and drive to ensure that each child in the school reaches their potential. You have quickly gained an understanding of the school's strengths and, just as importantly, what needs to be done to move the school's overall effectiveness to good.

Since your appointment, you have introduced much greater rigour to the performance management of teachers. All have been given targets that relate to the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. Consequently, senior leaders have made teachers much more accountable for the quality of their professional practice and its impact on pupils' outcomes.

In order to drive forward improvements in the quality of teaching, you and your colleagues have attended training to hone your coaching skills. The aim of this training is to enable senior leaders to support colleagues to meet their performance targets. Senior leaders report that evidence collected from lesson observations, the scrutiny of work in pupils' books and meetings with pupils indicate that the quality of teaching is improving across the school. This conclusion is further reinforced by the teaching and learning review, undertaken in November, by a colleague from the local authority and a headteacher from a local, successful primary school. However, it is too early to measure the impact that these improvements in classroom practice are having on students' outcomes. Leaders' records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning are detailed. They provide clear evidence of the supportive and developmental approach that you and your senior colleagues are taking to improve teachers' work in classrooms. However, although teachers' professional strengths are identified, not enough emphasis is yet placed on the impact that these strengths have on pupils' progress.

In order to address concerns with pupils' writing, highlighted at the previous inspection, senior leaders supported by the governing body have identified two

teachers to lead on developing pupil's literacy across all key stages. Both teachers have attended relevant training. Although it is early days, there are positive signs of the impact that this initiative is having on pupils' writing. Evidence from the work in pupils' books indicates that they are now given more opportunities to write at length about topics that interest them. However, you and your colleagues are realistic, aware that in order to sustain these early gains further work needs to be done to improve pupils' writing.

Teachers mark pupils' writing regularly, but teachers' comments are often not incisive enough. They use praise liberally, which helps to boost pupils' confidence, but not enough emphasis is placed on what pupils need to do to improve their work. As a consequence, teachers' marking has yet to have sufficient impact on pupils' progress.

Leaders have written a school improvement plan, which responds to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and also reflects their own evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness. The actions to be taken to address each of the priorities are well defined and those colleagues responsible for implementing each action are identified. Consequently, lines of accountability are clear. Unmistakable links are made between the actions being taken to improve the school and their impact on pupils' outcomes; however, success criteria are not always sharp enough. Often, these are presented as headline figures for pupils' attainment and progress, with not enough emphasis on the performance of groups from their different starting points.

At the previous inspection, the governing body was found to have many strengths. However, it was evaluated by inspectors as not providing enough challenge to senior leaders and not holding them sufficiently to account for the decline in the quality of teaching at Key Stage 2. Accordingly, a local authority adviser carried out a review of governance to determine how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved. As a result, and under the leadership of the recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body, governors are now providing a much more robust challenge to senior leaders than was the case in the past.

You are taking steps to ensure that the school website complies with all the statutory regulations. Furthermore, an administrative error on the school's single central record, discovered at the time of my visit, was rectified whilst I was on site.

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

Prior to the most recent inspection, the local authority had adopted a light touch approach to supporting the school. However, since the inspection the local authority has been more actively involved in helping senior leaders address the most pressing priorities in the school improvement plan. As mentioned above, a local authority representative carried out the review of school governance, which resulted in this aspect of school leadership and management becoming more effective. The local authority has also brokered effective links with two local successful schools, St. Michael's Church of England Primary School, Bamford and St Michael's Church of England Primary School Alkrington. The headteachers of both schools work effectively with you to improve the quality of teaching and assist you and your colleagues in addressing the priorities in the school improvement plan.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale and the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Manchester

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector