

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



6 January 2016

Lisa Fahy  
Headteacher  
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School  
Earlsbury Gardens  
Birchfield  
Birmingham  
B20 3AE

Dear Mrs Fahy

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 December 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

**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:**

- evaluate the actions listed on the school development plan to determine which are having an impact and which need to be revised
- resume the checks made on the quality of teaching by senior leaders to establish where additional support is required
- ensure that teachers focus on the specific needs of pupils when marking their writing in order to pinpoint areas for improvement.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with two representatives from St Mary's Teaching School Alliance, who were commissioned by the local authority to provide external support. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You joined me on brief visits to classes to talk to pupils about their work. Samples of pupils' writing and mathematics work were also looked at. A range of documentation was reviewed, including: a list of staff training activities; minutes from committee and full governing body meetings; an external review of governance and teaching and learning. The latest information about pupils' achievement, the school's single central record and self-evaluation procedures were also evaluated.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staff changes. Six teachers have left the school and three new staff have been appointed, two of these being newly qualified teachers. An assistant headteacher post has been created to strengthen the leadership capacity within the school. The assistant headteacher and deputy headteacher have resumed class teaching roles, having previously been non-class based. The deputy headteacher teaches and leads the early years and the assistant headteacher teaches in Year 6 and leads literacy. Some teachers have changed year groups.

## **Main findings**

You have begun to address the issues raised in the previous report and, as a result, the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes are improving. With support from an external consultant, you have adapted the format of the school development plan, which sets out clear actions for improvement. Although the plan includes measureable milestones and shows precisely who will monitor these, it has yet to be evaluated to show the impact of the actions taken. Following the section 5 inspection, you and your leadership team carried out regular monitoring activities to check on the quality of teaching. However, these checks have dwindled in the autumn term. As a result, there is little evidence to support your judgements about the quality of teaching or to contribute to teachers' performance management.

Expectations have been raised and the work seen in pupils' books during the visit shows that the presentation and quality are improving. Pupils' books are shared during staff meetings as a form of peer accountability. Writing and mathematical skills are now practised more frequently, as evidenced in pupils' science and non-core books. For example, pupils in Year 6 have constructed bar graphs to compare the climate in Brazil and the United Kingdom. They also explained the functions of major organs by telling it as a story to younger pupils.

Teachers now pay greater attention to pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Most teachers pick up and address words which pupils regularly misspell. Pupils themselves revisit and correct some of these errors. Pupils spoken to told me

that they use a dictionary to help with unknown spellings or ask a partner for help. You recognise that there is still further work to do to address pupils' specific needs. For example, in correcting letter reversals or introducing new concepts such as the use of paragraphs or possessive apostrophes when pupils show they are ready. The content of pupils' writing is improving, together with their handwriting. You have successfully introduced a new system for assessing pupils' writing. Moderation carried out by the local authority and other schools shows that teachers' assessment of pupils' writing is accurate.

You and other members of the leadership team have revised the school's marking policy. However, you acknowledge that not all teachers use this consistently across the school and that it requires further development. In accordance with your policy, pupils are beginning to self-assess against the objectives set and teachers use smiley faces to show pupils if they have achieved the objectives. Teachers set extension questions inside speech bubbles to check pupils' understanding. For example, 'which bar do you think is healthier and why?' However, on occasion, teachers detract from the school's policy and write simple statements such as 'good' or 'well done' rather than identifying how pupils could improve their work. Additionally, some teachers model what the work should look like rather than asking pupils to do this for themselves.

Progress is beginning to accelerate in the early years. A greater proportion of children reached a good level of development in 2015 than in previous years, but the proportion was still well below the national average. Children's writing in the current Reception class has improved considerably since September. Work checked in their books shows that on entry to school, most children could form single, recognisable letters. During the inspection visit, children demonstrated their ability to write simple sentences to re-tell the Christmas story. Children were also able to confidently re-read their own work. Additional resources have been purchased to improve the outdoor learning area, which allows children to choose and collect their own equipment. The early years leader checks children's ability levels when they join the school in Reception year. This shows that, in 2015, most children joining the school have the skills and knowledge which are typical for their age. The early years leader has put together a clear action plan to build on children's starting points.

The unvalidated published data for 2015 shows that achievement is rising at the end of Key Stage 2. Pupils who left Year 6 in 2015 made at least expected progress in all subjects and good progress in reading. As a result, attainment was similar to the national average in reading, writing and mathematics for the first time since 2011. There was a significant improvement in mathematics, but there is still more to be done, especially for the most-able pupils. However, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 fell in 2015, and were significantly below average overall. The proportion of pupils achieving the level required in the Year 1 phonics check has continued to rise and was in line with the national average. This indicates that early reading skills are taught well.

Governors acknowledge that, until recently, they have not held leaders fully to account for their work in improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement. Governors are determined to address this and, as a result, acted swiftly on the recommendation to commission a review of governance. An action plan has been devised and governors are now putting the proposals made into place. They are currently completing a skills audit to identify where their strengths and areas for improvement lie. However, there are still two governor vacancies. Also, governors have not made sure that the information required on the school's website has been kept fully up to date. Checks made before this inspection visit showed that several gaps still existed in the statutory information required for parents. The missing information has now been uploaded and the website is compliant.

### **External support**

Support was commissioned by the local authority from St Mary's Teaching School Alliance (TSA) in September 2014, and has continued until recently. TSA advisers have led or brokered training and have provided advice and support to teachers and senior leaders. As a result, all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, have a clearer understanding of the principles of teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, there have been significant improvements to the provision and outcomes in the early years. This arrangement has now come to an end, but Birmingham Education Partnership has identified a new partner to support the school. Teachers' checks on the standard of pupils' work have been overseen by local authority advisers and validated as accurate in the early years and Year 6.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**