

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



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Mrs Jose Hodgkins
Associate Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Catholic Community School
Victoria Road
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA1 2UE

Dear Mrs Hodgkins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Cuthbert's Catholic Community School

Following my visit to your school on 9 February 2016, 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 September 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- immediately improve the quality of teaching; particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1
- ensure that leaders and teachers have sufficient training to help them teach mathematics effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and members of the governing body. I held telephone discussions with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan, observed learning and behaviour through a number of short visits to lessons and listened to pupils at social times.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the school's previous inspection has retired. You are the headteacher of a local school and you have been appointed as associate headteacher of St Cuthbert's for three and a half days each week. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. The Years 5 and 6 class has been split into two separate classes.

Main findings

As associate headteacher, you have developed an action plan and you have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching in school. You have already brought in much helpful expertise to support teaching, learning and leadership but the developments are very new and are yet to have an impact.

A new tracking system is in place to monitor progress in English, mathematics and science but there is no tracking of pupils' progress in the foundation subjects, leaving a gap in senior leaders' understanding of achievement. Senior leaders do not monitor teachers' planning regularly enough, so teaching takes place that is not suited to all pupils; consequently some make no progress.

The school action plan needs to be more precise. Targets need to be realistic and achievable. You need to say precisely when and how progress will be monitored so that teachers become clear about what is expected of them and governors will know if changes are being made quickly enough. Reviews of governance and the pupil premium are scheduled to take place in the near future. Governors know that standards need to improve quickly; they are considering options for the long-term leadership of the school as they were unsuccessful in appointing a new headteacher in the autumn. Governors are aware that they need to hold leaders to account much more rigorously. The school has a deficit budget, which is hindering your attempts to bring in the necessary support to raise standards rapidly.

I observed some weak teaching. Over time, this is resulting in too many pupils not making the progress of which they are capable. A key weakness is that teachers do not plan well enough for pupils' different needs. Teachers do not follow the school's marking policy consistently: they do not correct mistakes and misconceptions as they go; they do not challenge incorrect answers or take steps to help pupils if they write numbers or letters backwards. The teaching of mathematics remains a significant weakness: teachers do not show pupils how to complete basic calculations correctly.

As a result, some of the most-able pupils make adequate progress but other pupils struggle and get things wrong.

The outdoor provision for Reception children has been extended but it has not improved learning. Too many children spend time on activities that do not improve their progress and sometimes there are too many children on the same activity, resulting in squabbles. Opportunities are missed for children to develop mark-making and writing skills.

The topics chosen by teachers do not always promote excitement and a love of learning. This leads to lapses in concentration and off-task behaviour. Teachers do not always use the school's 'traffic light' behaviour management system to manage poor behaviour effectively.

Attendance has not improved on the same period last year and is below average; this is partly due to the floods that affected the area in December.

External support

The local authority has seconded you to be the associate headteacher for three and a half days per week. There is support from a number of local schools and networks for mathematics and the early years, and from the local authority to monitor progress. However, there is little impact from this work and pupils' lack of progress remains a concern.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Lancaster Diocese, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector