

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 Anne Radford
Executive Headteacher
Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School
Sparrow Hall Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L9 6BU

Dear Mrs Radford

Special measures monitoring inspection of Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Take urgent steps to improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is at least good, in order to raise standards for all groups of pupils in all key stages, so that they can make good or better progress by:
 - ensuring that the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are taught consistently well in all classes, including in the early years, with a focus on improving writing in particular
 - raising teachers' expectations regarding the progress pupils should make, especially for disadvantaged pupils
 - using information about what pupils know and can do to set work that is suitably difficult, especially for the most able, and which helps them to learn well
 - ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to respond to teachers' marking and to improve their work themselves
 - planning work which pupils find interesting and challenging so as to improve their concentration and attitudes to learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels including governance by:
 - establishing rigorous systems to measure the performance of staff and the impact they have on raising standards for pupils and ensure that governors hold leaders to account for doing so
 - ensuring that planned improvement is rapid and keeps to tight timescales
 - setting up procedures to check that assessments of pupils' skills and knowledge are accurate
 - ensuring rigorous and specific targets are set for individual pupils which accelerate the progress of those who are underachieving so that they catch up quickly
 - regularly checking on the progress that all different groups of pupils make and taking swift action if any group are not achieving as well as they should.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring teaching is stimulating and motivates pupils well so that they develop good attitudes to learning
 - ensuring all teachers have the skills to manage pupils' behaviour effectively
 - improving record keeping so that systems are rigorous and all incidents of poor behaviour are noted along with the impact of any action taken in order to prevent recurrence.

- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - ensuring that work with families to reduce absence is effective
 - checking and analysing patterns of absence in relation to specific groups, especially disadvantaged pupils, and using this information to identify the specific actions needed to improve attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils that are frequently absent.

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.

At the previous monitoring visit, on the 2 and 3 July 2015, Her Majesty's Inspector also advised leaders and managers:

- as a matter of urgency, to ensure that the administration and recording of information that is necessary to keep pupils safe, especially records of incidents and misbehaviour, are robust and accurate.

This was reinforced following the monitoring visit on the 29 and 30 September 2015 when Her Majesty's Inspector further advised leaders and managers to:

- as a matter of urgency, ensure that safeguarding requirements are stringent and effective and that all staff receive high quality and appropriate training to enable them to carry out their safeguarding duties responsibly.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 March 2016

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised a wide range of school and associated documentation, the latest external monitoring report, evidence of classroom monitoring as well as a range of documentation linked to governance, behaviour and safety. He met with the executive headteacher and deputy headteacher as well as several other key teaching staff. In addition, discussions were held with several groups of pupils and two representatives from the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector also talked to a number of parents attending a parents' meeting on the first day of the inspection. All of the teaching observations were joint observations. Teaching sessions focused specifically on the impact of the teaching on pupils' learning and the quality of work in their books. Special attention was paid to the teaching of phonics (the teaching of letters and the sounds that they make) in the lower school. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector completed a book scrutiny covering pupils' work in English, mathematics, science, history and geography.

Context

The current school year has been a very turbulent period for the school. Since the last monitoring visit in September 2015, there has been a significant restructuring of the teaching and management responsibilities. Four staff have left and replacement appointments have been made. Several teachers have been moved between classes and appointed to new subject leadership posts. The subject leads for English and mathematics are very new in post. Two support staff, including the site manager, are currently on extended absence. In addition, the archdiocese has provided significant additional funding to refurbish the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since she was appointed in late September, the executive headteacher has reinvigorated the school with her can-do attitude and no-nonsense approach. A strong team ethic has been established with the support of the deputy headteacher. Together they have been able to initiate many of the improvements which are now taking place. Staff morale is buoyant and this is exemplified by a significant reduction in staff absenteeism which had plagued the school previously. Teacher satisfaction is now higher than it has been for a long time. Management is strong and incisive and has resulted in very rapid change and improvement in a school where previously the pace of change had been far too slow. The school is now very different from the one inspected in September and both parents and pupils are very appreciative of the changes that have been made.

The school environment has visibly improved. Corridors have been carpeted, replastered and painted. A new computer room has recently been installed and pupils remarked that they were excited about being able to use the new computers. Classrooms have been decluttered, repainted and refurbished with new furniture. They are now welcoming places in which pupils can learn. Pupils have worked with

two artists in residence to produce a mural which weaves the school into the story of Liverpool. This will provide a visual display down the length of one long corridor and exemplifies the Christian and British values that the school stands for. Other corridors have a rich tapestry of displays celebrating pupils' work and provide good evidence of work across the curriculum. For example, the display on Hadrian's Wall provides a rich opportunity for pupils to show their ability to apply mathematical skills with a focus on measurements of every kind.

There is increased rigour in the way in which the school is being managed. For example, classroom practice is now monitored in a meticulous way, on a weekly basis, by the deputy headteacher. This is developmental, with professional discussions leading to aspects of practice that can be improved. Monitoring evidence is analysed and shows that teaching is improving. It also identifies specifically where practice is less good and allows support to be provided. The newly appointed subject leaders for English and mathematics have already identified aspects of teaching in their subjects which need improving. They are utilising their good subject knowledge to give advice, recommend resources and provide support to their colleagues. They are providing clear leadership and direction for their subjects.

Relationships with parents are also improving. Those attending the parents evening were fully appreciative of the recent changes that have taken place. They noted that their children were getting more frequent and challenging homework and felt that their children were well-cared-for and much happier. One of the parents with a child in Year 6 was very positive about the recent improvements. However, her only regret was that these have come far too late for her child to benefit and fulfil his potential.

Governance has also been reinvigorated. Governors are much more focused on providing strategic leadership for the school and holding school leaders to account. There is a strong professional partnership developing and discussions are, 'candid and frank'. As one governor identified, 'There are no secrets in the school anymore.' They are kept well informed and they understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are fully supportive of the initiatives and changes being implemented at a rapid pace.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Class reorganisation is beginning to have an impact. Although not all of the weak teaching has been fully eradicated, overall more teaching is now effective and of higher quality. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work show that there is much greater challenge in more lessons and, in most classes, pupils have made good progress in their learning since the end of September. The quality of the writing in particular is quite noticeable in many cases. There is clear evidence that pupils now use writing which was fluent, joined up and legible, when previously it was printed and not always clearly shaped. There is strong competition among pupils to improve their writing and ensure it is of a sufficiently good standard to enable them to get a 'pen licence'. Equally significant improvements in spelling and the use of correct punctuation are also evident across several classes.

The good-quality teaching is clearly linked to good-quality questioning and teacher awareness of individual pupil needs. For example, in one lesson the teacher understood that she needed to check on how well the weaker group of pupils understood the strategies to investigate the sum of the internal angles of polygons. She was aware that two pupils had not been present the previous lesson and made sure that they initially joined the group she was supporting. Meanwhile, higher ability pupils were being stretched by being asked to use algebraic formulae to make their calculations. Much more effective use is also being made of appropriate and high-quality resources.

The teaching of phonics is stronger in the early years than in Key Stage 1 because the focus is much more clearly on pupil response, with pupils being encouraged to practise, repeat and correct letters and sounds. In Key Stage 1, there is a greater emphasis on the pupils copying and following the teacher. There is less evidence of pupils taking responsibility for self-correcting, or developing their own recognition and pronunciation of letters and words.

The quality of marking has improved. It is now much clearer, especially in those classes where the teaching is consistently effective. It was evident that in these classes pupils were listening and taking on board the advice offered by the teacher and improving their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes have demonstrably improved and they are very keen to learn. It is very clear from talking to the pupils that they are very proud of their school and enjoy their lessons much more than in the past. As one mother mentioned, 'There has been a real change in the attitude of my child. She is keen to get into school and skips all the way here.'

Pupils feel safe in school and identified some of the improvements that have been put in place. These include a medical room where medicines are now stored safely and out of reach of pupils. Cupboards, where hazardous materials are stored, are now locked and secure. Fire safety procedures are robust. Nursery access is now safe and procedures for the collection of children from the Nursery are clear and being adhered to. The wire fencing around the junior playground has been replaced and there are no broken sections where pupils can snag themselves on protruding wires, hurting themselves in the process. Locks have been changed on internal and external doors. Safeguarding was a major concern in September but is now significantly more secure. Despite these modifications and improvements there is a clear understanding that high levels of vigilance need to be maintained.

The single central record of recruitment and vetting checks covering all staff and others identified by the school as having regular contact with children meets requirements.

During the previous monitoring inspection in September, provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability was judged to be 'disorganised and dysfunctional'. Currently, this aspect still needs further improvement and school

leaders and governors are aware of this. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been appointed and took up post a few weeks ago. Prior to her appointment, the SENCo from Holy Name RC Primary reorganised record-keeping. There is now an up-to-date register of the pupils who require and are receiving support. Systems are being established to enable better recognition of pupils who require help and support. The whole organisation of special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision is under review and there is a clear timetable for improvements to be implemented.

Procedures to ensure that especially vulnerable pupils are kept safe are secure. Prompt and accurate action is taken when anyone raises concerns about a pupil. There are good working relationships with other schools and agencies to support vulnerable individuals and effectively resolve any concerns.

The reporting of behaviour and accidents is now more rigorous. With improvements in teaching, behaviour management issues have been much reduced. In those lessons where teaching is weaker, pupils, especially boys, become bored, lose interest and become restless. However, this is now the exception rather than the rule.

Pupils themselves identified that behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved. Incidents of bullying are much reduced. Pupils are confident that appropriate action would be taken by teachers should any incidents occur.

Low attendance continues to be a concern and has not been helped by the fact that the school has been struck by chickenpox and tonsillitis epidemics in recent months. It is highly likely that the target figure of 97% will not be met this year. Appropriate procedures to monitor and improve attendance are now well established and first response to absence is good. Rewards and incentives are encouraging pupils to improve their attendance. However, progress in this area is still too slow.

Outcomes for pupils

The school continues to suffer from a past legacy of weaker teaching. The classes most affected are the Year 2 and Year 6 classes. School information shows that standards in these two classes are likely to dip this summer, although an upward trend is predicted after that. Pupils are beginning to make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics in the other classes, where there is consistently higher-quality teaching and staffing has been more stable.

A predicted decline in the number of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the early years is also a concern. This cohort has a large number of children with specific learning, emotional and behavioural needs. The number of pupils attaining the expected level in the phonics screening check, although below the national average, increased last year and this is expected to be maintained this current year. Staff are being provided with additional training to improve standards in this area.

Pupils enjoy reading and are very positive about making improvements. The reading scheme is better organised and managed than previously and the refurbished library has boosted interest. Pupils talked excitedly about being 'reading revolutionaries', which means having opportunities to read and discuss a book in small groups. Parents identified that pupils are having their books changed more regularly and are bringing these home in the evenings.

Writing continues to be a weakness, as this aspect has not been addressed with sufficient rigour in recent years. However, there is evidence in classes other than Year 2 and Year 6 that recent initiatives linked to good teaching are beginning to have an impact. This continues to be a work in progress.

External support

The school continues to rely heavily on the very good support it is receiving from the local authority, local schools and the archdiocese. The recent intense and well-coordinated effort from all partners is beginning to bear fruit. The school continues to receive extensive local authority consultant support, especially for English and mathematics. This has been particularly important in ensuring the new subject leads hit the ground running. The Liverpool learning partnership continues to provide funding for staff secondments to ensure that quality staff are in post and able to implement the changes required. The funding from the archdiocese to improve the school environment has been wisely spent and has had an immediate impact. This is having a very positive influence on both staff morale and on the attitudes of the children, who really feel valued and are responding much more positively in their lessons.