

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 March 2017

Mrs Kelly Watson
Headteacher
St Gregory's RC Primary School
Presto Street
Farnworth
Bolton
Lancashire
BL4 8AJ

Dear Mrs Watson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gregory's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 2017, 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 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2016, 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- establish staffing arrangements that will sustain the improvement of the school for the long term, particularly in the early years, the school office and for the post of deputy headteacher
- make sure that teaching, including for the most able pupils, is consistently strong across the curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 so that all pupils make good and better progress
- develop the work of middle leaders so that they have a deeper understanding of the quality of teaching and how to improve, including in science.

Evidence

During the monitoring visit, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders. I met with a diocesan representative, a representative of the local authority and with two members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plan. With you, I toured the school to observe pupils at work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes of staff. You took up post as headteacher in September 2016. The deputy headteacher left in December 2016. The new Reception teacher, who joined you on a one-year secondment from another school, is currently acting deputy headteacher. There is a newly qualified teacher in Year 1. The teacher in Year 2 was new to the school in summer 2016. One teacher is on an extended leave of absence. Two supply teachers are employed to give assistance with teaching each week. The school has recently started to operate a daily breakfast club for some pupils.

Main findings

As the new headteacher you are giving the school clear, renewed leadership and a sharp focus on improvement. You act carefully to continue the improvements made by the previous headteacher, as well as to identify other areas that you need to address. You have considered very carefully the 2016 test results, published after the previous inspection, that confirm the challenges the school faces.

Through frequent visits to classrooms and careful checks on the quality of work, you are well informed about where teaching and learning are improving. You give full consideration to the views of pupils, parents, staff and governors in reviewing the school's work. You make sure that change only happens where and when it is needed. You use your understanding of the school skilfully and positively to establish a shared understanding among staff and governors about why the school is not yet good.

You moved quickly to review and strengthen previously adequate safety and safeguarding arrangements. Record-keeping, information sharing and the training of staff, for example, are all much improved. You are tracking the occurrence of issues with much care and making sure that senior leaders review and act upon information with skill. You have reviewed and enhanced children's safety, for example relocating the main outdoor play area for the Reception class to a new, carefully arranged play space. The quality of children's learning across subjects in the early years is now much stronger because of improved leadership. The quality of teaching in the school is improving. New teachers are now working in year groups where weaknesses were identified at the time of the previous

inspection. Leaders are increasing and enhancing the support given to all staff about how to improve their teaching. More staff are now learning from colleagues within the school or at other local schools. Your monitoring indicates that because of better teaching, pupils, including boys, are more engaged in class activities. However, the quality of teaching is not consistently successful across the school and the needs of the most able pupils are not always met well.

Your reviews of learning identify that improving pupils' writing is an issue for the whole school. Recent training for staff matches explicit expectations now set for the work of teachers and teaching assistants in the teaching of writing. Staff now model writing much better for pupils and expect pupils to write more freely and extensively in activities. You have successfully re-established when it is appropriate for your pupils to move from writing in pencil to pen. You celebrate pupils' work through a weekly writing award.

You are improving how the school supports pupils who find learning difficult. Teaching assistants are now better deployed to support individual pupils. Teachers now plan more carefully for the needs of specific groups of pupils. Leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, check and evaluate the work of staff more precisely.

Senior leaders give much support to staff to enable them to understand fully the expectations of the new national curriculum and the changed assessment arrangements. You are successfully improving the school's assessment policy and procedures. Checks on the work of staff now look carefully at the accuracy of assessment and how well staff use information within teaching.

The behaviour of current pupils is good, for example in classes and in the dining hall. You are re-establishing high standards for pupils' behaviour. For example, in the way they dress for school. Staff receive extra training so they are more skilled in addressing any behaviour issues that might arise. Great efforts are now made to promote respect among pupils. Learning about bullying is included thoughtfully in the curriculum. You are promoting the value of good attendance at school with all pupils. Extra help is being provided for individual families who need more assistance to get their children to school regularly and on time. Nonetheless, you are determined to persevere, until all pupils attend school as much as they should.

The school's improvement plan is well structured and highlights clearly the actions that leaders are taking to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Plans are revised properly to take into account current assessment information and monitoring by senior leaders. You recognise the importance of developing the skills of middle leaders. You want colleagues to have a fuller understanding of the quality of teaching in different subjects, including in science, so that they assist you better with the improvement of the school. Although an external review of governance was not recommended at the previous inspection, inspectors did indicate that governors need to improve the quality of

their work. Governors now have an increasingly clear and informed picture of the quality of education provided at St Gregory's. Extensive changes to the membership of the governing body, new training and much-increased links with the local authority are improving the quality of governance. Governors now check what they are told or given to read by leaders. They meet regularly with a range of key staff to hear about improvement. They check and debate whether enough improvement has occurred in line with the school's improvement plans. Governors are becoming much more skilful in challenging and supporting the headteacher. They know the serious situation the school may find itself in if it is not judged to be good at the next inspection. They are working to fill the remaining vacancies in governing body membership as soon as possible.

A key obstacle to the long-term development of the school is staffing. You are correct that with the lack of enough staff to assist you with the administration of the school, you have too many responsibilities to juggle. Governors acknowledge this challenge and plans are in place to resolve this matter. The quality of the early years provision in the school is improving because of the skilful work of the acting deputy headteacher. She also brings added strength to the work of the school leadership team. However, she is on secondment from another school and the staffing of the Reception class for next year is as yet undecided. The recruitment of a permanent deputy headteacher to the school is imminent. Until these matters are resolved fully, they remain key challenges for the school moving forward.

External support

You are making good links with the local authority to improve the school and to bring the right amount of support for yourself, staff and governors. Teachers and leaders are benefiting from the regular visits from the local authority, including its whole-school reviews of improvement. Your frequent meetings with a local authority representative help you to identify what you have achieved in the short time that you have been in post, as well as to consider your next steps. You draw fully upon local authority knowledge of other local schools, to make links for the benefit of staff at St Gregory's.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector