

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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

Dear Mrs Watson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory's RC Primary School, Farnworth, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 30 April to 1 May 2019, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may 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 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

Naomi Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.

- Rapidly increase the proportion of pupils that reach the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2, by ensuring that:
 - teaching enables pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and pupils for whom English is not their first language, to make accelerated progress, so that they catch up with all pupils nationally.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment across the school, including in the early years, in a wide range of subjects, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement
 - teachers regularly intervene in learning and adapt teaching when necessary, so that pupils are helped to make strong progress across a wide range of subject areas
 - teachers accurately assess pupils' learning and set appropriately challenging work for all pupils, particularly the most able pupils, so that they are supported to reach the highest possible standards
 - teachers enable pupils to gain subject-specific skills and knowledge in a range of different subjects.
- Urgently improve leadership and management, by:
 - developing leadership, particularly that of subject leaders and SEN, so that leaders can accurately monitor pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility and take swift action where these need to improve
 - developing a broad and interesting curriculum that supports pupils to make good progress in a wide range of subjects
 - improving governors' oversight of teaching, and the use of pupil premium and SEN funding, so that they can rigorously hold school leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes and attendance
 - ensuring that all staff have training in the 'Prevent' duty and are able to identify the early signs that may indicate that pupils are at risk of radicalisation.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - improving overall attendance and reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school, including in the early years.

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.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 30 April 2019 to 1 May 2019

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspector observed teaching and learning jointly with the headteacher. She held meetings with subject leaders, senior leaders, the chair and other members of the governing body, the headteacher as the designated safeguarding leader, a local leader in education (LLE), a local authority representative and a representative from the diocese. The inspector spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. She held a meeting with pupils and spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. During the inspection, the inspector reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation; records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; the school website; school policies; and pupils' work.

Context

The school was put into special measures in April 2018. Since this inspection, the chair of the governing body resigned, as did several members of the governing body. There is a new chair of the governing body and several new members of the governing body. The headteacher, the diocese and the local authority have enlisted support from a national leader in education (NLE), a local leader in education (LLE) and an independent consultant. A number of staff have left the school and new appointments have been made. A restructure of senior and middle leadership has led to several new appointments and they have been allocated specific roles and responsibilities now, including leadership of English. The leader of English is a secondee from an outstanding school. Several teachers have taken on new responsibilities as subject leaders for other curriculum areas, including the arts and humanities.

The school has been the subject of a directive academy order from the regional schools commissioner since July 2018. Progress made towards academy status has been slow. However, an agreement has now been reached by all partners for the school to join the St Theresa of Calcutta Catholic Trust on 1 October 2019 as a sponsored academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher's ambitious vision for St Gregory's is shared by staff and governors. Together, they have worked hard to implement the actions set out in the school's improvement plan. The headteacher and LLE have made sure that staff, including those in the senior leadership team, have clearly defined roles and responsibilities so that they know what is expected of them now. The headteacher

has put together suitable teams to lead key aspects of the school's work, for example safeguarding and attendance. Together with the NLE and LLE, the headteacher has prioritised training and support for leaders and staff so that they have the confidence and competence to do their jobs well.

Staff have embraced the changes made since the headteacher was appointed and since the previous inspection. They have found the intense focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning a challenge but are resolute in improving many aspects of school life for the sake of the pupils. Staff appreciate the amount of training they have received, although this has been demanding on their time. They told the inspector that they find the opportunities to observe teaching, moderate pupils' work and receive help with planning very useful.

The governing body is resolute in its commitment to making sure that the quality of education improves rapidly for pupils. It has deployed its experience, skills and expertise well. It has challenged and supported the leadership of the school in making necessary improvement. Although many of these strategies are in their infancy, the rate of improvement has rapidly accelerated since the previous inspection. The governors have worked with the potential sponsor and the local authority to overcome the obstacles to the school becoming an academy.

An external review of governance has been completed and a rolling programme of support will continue until the school becomes an academy. A skills audit of governors has ensured that, when appointing new governors, the priority will be to plug any gaps in expertise. Relatively new governors are developing their skills in how they can best support the school, alongside holding senior leaders to account.

The local authority and the diocese have brokered the support of an LLE, an NLE and an independent consultant. Senior leaders are growing in confidence. These new leaders have a good understanding of what needs to be in place to compensate for previously weak leadership and poor quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, the school's improvement plan provides for the implementation of required actions and specific intended outcomes by which leaders can measure their effectiveness over time. Leaders have been successful in ensuring that the changes they have implemented so far have been adopted by all staff. Examples of these changes are a new curriculum, new timetables, new whole-school approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics, lesson planning requirements and a revised assessment system. Although it is too early to come to definitive conclusions, there have been noticeable improvements in the amount of work that pupils complete and their rates of progress in English and mathematics.

The leader for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is showing effective leadership skills. There is evidence of improvements to the support that SEND pupils receive, both internally and through external organisations. The SEND coordinator is proving successful in securing additional funding for individuals. Governor minutes show that governors are now asking

pertinent questions to assess the impact on pupils' social and emotional development and achievement.

Staff morale is generally very positive, but maintaining this has been challenging following the Ofsted judgement of special measures. There is now a staff well-being group with representatives from administration, teaching assistants and teachers. This group report their findings and ideas directly to the headteacher to ensure that a support mechanism is in place if there are any concerns.

All staff have had training in the 'Prevent' duty and demonstrated a clear understanding of the potential risks in what was a predominantly White British community with a growing number of families from overseas. Staff are clear about the systems and procedures for raising concerns linked to safety and safeguarding. In addition to safeguarding and 'Prevent' duties, the school has recently been acknowledged with a 'School of Sanctuary' award, in recognition of the work that staff do to welcome refugees and asylum seekers. Staff and pupils are proactive in making families feel welcome and helping pupils and their parents to settle and make friends in the community.

The members of the safeguarding team, with the headteacher as the designated safeguarding leader, and three deputy safeguarding leaders, are effective in their work. The online system for recording any concerns is thorough and shared with relevant external agencies. A learning mentor has been appointed to work with vulnerable pupils and their families. This is having a positive impact on improving attendance and reducing persistent absences.

Senior leaders and their external NLE and LLE colleagues have provided support for teachers who are new to leading foundation subjects. Senior leaders have helped middle leaders to design suitable curriculum plans for each subject. Although there has been a strong emphasis on improving English and mathematics since the previous inspection, pupils enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum covering a wide range of subjects. However, pupils' depth of knowledge, skills and understanding is not as well developed as it should be due to previously weaker teaching.

A pupil premium review has taken place and there is now a more individual and targeted approach for pupils. There is evidence of pupils developing their resilience and social and emotional skills, which are improving disadvantaged pupils' readiness for learning. As a result, gaps in progress between disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally are beginning to diminish. Minutes of governors' meetings record that governors are asking more probing questions. They hold leaders to account for the use of additional funding to improve outcomes and attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the last inspection, leaders have prioritised improvements to teaching and learning. The training and support they have put in place for staff have paid dividends. The quality of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics has improved across the school. Moreover, most of the teaching assistants are making a significant contribution to pupils' day-to-day learning now.

All classes now follow agreed timetables, and teachers use information about pupils' learning effectively. The new curriculum plans to help design activities and class teams have given more careful thought to the classroom environment. Together with the improved subject knowledge of teachers in English and mathematics, these changes have helped to improve pupils' progress.

Senior leaders have overhauled the leadership of teaching and learning. The headteacher has implemented a system of performance management for teachers and teaching assistants. This system recognises the achievements of staff in addition to highlighting aspects requiring improvement. The ongoing training programme has ensured that all staff know what good teaching and learning looks like. Most teachers now have high expectations of pupils' achievement, including in the early years and across a range of subjects.

Classroom practice is continually being improved through high levels of effective support for all teaching staff. Newly qualified teachers are provided with bespoke support through an effective mentoring programme, including bespoke training and opportunities to see best practice in outstanding schools. It is for this reason, and because pupils' behaviour for learning is so positive, that I recommend that the school may now appoint newly qualified teachers.

Pupils' work seen during the inspection was assessed in accordance with the school's assessment and feedback policy. Several teachers use this information well. They consolidate pupils' learning, but occasionally misconceptions are not picked up straight away in lessons. This slows pupils' progress. Pupils take pride in their work and try hard to complete the challenges that they have been set.

Senior leaders have an accurate picture of where strengths in teaching, learning and assessment lie and they are focusing support where it is needed most. Where teaching and learning is at its best, activities are planned for the very wide range of abilities in each class, including the most able pupils. However, there are still some inconsistencies.

The appointment of subject leaders beyond English, mathematics and science has led to better planning by teachers and opportunities for pupils to build their knowledge skills and understanding in, for example, humanities and the arts. Unfortunately, because of a legacy of weaker teaching previously, pupils still have too many gaps in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have taken effective action to improve attendance. More pupils are in school every day than at the time of the last inspection. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average and persistent absences have reduced to below the national average.

There has been a significant decrease in persistent absences. These improvements are a direct result of improved systems and procedures to monitor and analyse attendance by year groups and different groups of pupils. There are whole-school approaches to rewarding the attendance of individuals and classes, which the pupils enjoy. The pastoral support team has a well-informed view of patterns and trends across the school. They use this information to show families where they can get support and help if they need it to improve attendance and punctuality. As a result, every year group in school has improved their attendance since the previous inspection.

Pupils have very positive relationships with each other and the adults around them. They make those pupils who are new to the school, and indeed the country, feel warmly welcomed. Pupils have excellent attitudes towards their work and because they are inspired by teachers and staff generally, they have high aspirations for future careers. St Gregory's is a calm and friendly community where everyone feels welcomed and cared for.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe both in and beyond school. They have a clear understanding of different forms of bullying and how to keep safe when online. There are transparent systems and procedures for pupils and parents to raise any concerns that they may have and an online system of chronological recording of incidents, actions taken and the outcomes. Pupils told the inspector that incidents of poor behaviour are rare but that they know they can turn to an adult if they are worried about anything.

Outcomes for pupils

A new system for assessing and tracking pupils' progress is in place. Leaders can be confident that they know what standard pupils are working at and the progress being made over time in English and mathematics. The evidence that leaders have, from pupils' books, lesson observations and assessment checks through half-termly pupil progress meetings, confirms that pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics than at the time of the last inspection. There are curriculum plans in place, not just for English and mathematics, but across the wider curriculum. However, the assessment system for subjects other than English and mathematics is in its infancy and needs further development.

The proportion of pupils who are reaching the expected standards in English and mathematics across key stages 1 and 2 is increasing. However, due to a legacy of

weak leadership and management and teaching that has not previously been of a high enough standard, several older pupils have gaps in their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants provide bespoke additional support and interventions to address this. There is also more targeted support for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and those for whom English is an additional language. The progress of all groups of pupils and individuals is closely monitored. It is evident that most pupils make expected progress, but work is being done to accelerate further the progress of more pupils. Work is being done to accelerate further the progress of more pupils to ensure that more reach the higher standards. The leaders for pupils with SEND, for those who are disadvantaged and for those pupils for whom English is an additional language are highly focused on monitoring these groups. Bespoke support both from staff and external organisations is now in place for groups and individuals. This is ensuring that all pupils are catching up with other pupils nationally, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, but also across the wider curriculum.

External support

The quality of support provided by the local authority and the diocese has been essential to the school making improvements since the last inspection. The input from an LLE and an NLE of outstanding primary schools continues to provide support to address key areas in the school development plan. The governing body has benefited from an external review and an audit of governors' skills and is continuing to improve its work through ongoing support from an external consultant.

The local authority, diocese and governing body have reached an agreement in response to a directive academy order. They have agreed that the school will join the St Theresa of Calcutta Catholic Trust as a sponsored academy on 1 October 2019.