

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

05 February 2010

Mr Michael Gallagher
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's RC Primary School
Grindon Lane
Sunderland
SR4 8HP

Dear Mr Gallagher

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 04 February 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the teachers and pupils who gave up their time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection there has been some staff turbulence. Two teachers are currently on maternity leave and there are three teachers on long-term temporary contracts. The school has had difficulty in appointing an assistant headteacher and has made two internal appointments to management positions to lead developments in English and mathematics across the school. Since September 2009 all staff in Key Stage 2 are new to their year groups and at the time of the inspection the majority of Year 6 pupils and their teachers were attending a week's residential visit in the Lake District.

As a result of the inspection on 06 and 07 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in reading, especially in pupils' ability to read and understand a wide range of texts in all subjects
- improve the accuracy of teachers' assessment and their use of it to plan and track pupils' learning
- improve the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in those lessons for which they are withdrawn from class; improve provision and ensure that staff have sufficient knowledge to teach specific programmes effectively.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Teachers have responded positively to the issues identified at its inspection in February 2008. They have improved pupils' attainment in reading across the school. In Key Stage 1 attainment in reading has risen year on year since the last inspection. In Key Stage 2 attainment in English dipped in 2009 to below national expectations; but in reading pupils' attainment rose, with 93% of pupils attaining the nationally expected Level 4 and 29% attained the higher Level 5. This is owing to the headteacher's focus on improving reading across the school. Teachers have accessed training to improve guided reading in lessons. New reading books, a published reading scheme and books to support the curriculum have been purchased which have improved resources for pupils. Reading interventions have been successful in raising the attainment of identified pupils who were falling behind so that they have caught up with their peers. A new computer-based programme to improve reading and spelling for pupils with specific learning difficulties is very popular with pupils and is aiding their progress.

The school has reorganised the timetable so that all pupils take part in 'early bird' sessions at the beginning of every day which focus on identifying different groups of pupils across the school who require extra help in reading and writing. These sessions are delivered by all teachers and well-trained teaching assistants. The school's own tracking data shows that in most classes the majority of pupils are now working at age-related expectations and making better progress in reading.

The focus on training for teaching assistants has also improved the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Intervention programmes are closely targeted to individuals' needs and there is evidence that these short, sharp interventions have resulted in some pupils being removed from the special educational needs register because of the good progress they have made.

The school has been less successful in embedding systems for assessing pupils' work across the school. This is in some part due to changes in staffing and teachers moving year groups but also because all teachers are not yet secure in their understanding of how to use the information they collect to plan lessons which will move pupils from one level to the next. This aspect of the school's work has a high priority in the current School Improvement Plan and work by new subject leaders to improve this area is ongoing. The school has worked with the local authority to introduce Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) materials across the school. These are not yet fully embedded in reading, writing and mathematics across the school and there have been inconsistencies in the way they are used to assess pupils' learning. Senior leaders have recognised this in their action plan and they are revising the current system to ensure that all teachers are fully trained and can use these materials more effectively.

Teaching and learning across the school have improved and the majority of lessons seen during the inspection were good. Teachers are planning for three different levels of ability in each lesson and most activities are closely matched to pupils' abilities. In mathematics lessons the activities are sometimes too hard or too easy and in these lessons pupils' progress slows. In the English lessons observed during the inspection, pupils made good progress because lessons were lively and the subject matter was interesting and relevant. Good links were made with other curriculum areas so that pupils could use their prior knowledge to improve their writing. For example, in a writing lesson for older pupils previous work in science was used well to help them debate and reason why a local wildlife pond should not be removed to build a skate park. Pupils made good progress in their ability to write a persuasive argument while developing their skills in constructing complex sentences and rhetorical questions.

The newly appointed middle managers are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating progress and attainment in their subjects. They hold termly meetings about pupils' progress with all teachers and discuss individual pupils' progress. The work in pupils' books and teachers' planning is scrutinised regularly and teachers are given good feedback and actions for improvement. Together with the headteacher and deputy headteacher they observe teaching and learning through classroom observations. However, currently these observations do not have a sufficient focus on monitoring pupils' learning. Written feedback to teachers is too often focused on improving systems and procedures instead of the impact that teaching is having on pupils' learning.

Senior leaders have accessed good support from the local authority and last year took part in the Improving Schools Programme. This initiative has helped the school to develop comprehensive tracking systems which highlight where pupils are falling behind and this has led to improved progress for pupils in most year groups. The headteacher has analysed the data closely and produced an action plan for each teacher to support improvements in pupils' progress across the year, which is closely monitored. He has also made provision for all teachers to visit other schools to observe good practice in teaching and has asked the local authority for support where necessary. The School Improvement Plan is succinct and focused on raising pupils' achievement in all sections. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked tirelessly to develop the skills of the new middle leaders in a short time and have built release time into the timetable so that they can carry out their monitoring activities and support colleagues. These developments are relatively new and have not yet had time to have an impact on pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. However, together with the school's own data, and the improvements in attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, the school's capacity to sustain improvements is improving.

The monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector