

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

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

Direct T 01695 566932
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: hcarnall@cfbt.com



29 November 2013

Mrs Kathryn Vernon
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wallasey
Wheatland Lane
Wallasey
Merseyside
CH44 7ED

Dear Mrs Vernon

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wallasey

Following my visit with Mary Liptrot, additional inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 November 2013, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2013

- Ensure that all teaching, especially in English and mathematics is good or better by:
 - making sure that teachers know how well pupils are doing and plan lessons that help pupils to learn more
 - ensuring that pupils have enough time in lessons to act on the advice given in teachers' marking in order to improve their work
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and make sure pupils have challenging targets to aim for, which they can understand and that help them to improve their work.

- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2 so they attain standards that are at least in line with the national average and make good or better progress by:
 - teaching pupils how to write at greater length and for different purposes
 - ensuring that the basic skills of reading, writing, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) are taught in all subjects
 - addressing gaps in pupils' mathematical understanding, including their ability to carry out basic calculations, and giving pupils more opportunities to practise these skills in lessons
 - improving the teaching of reading in Key Stage 2 so pupils can read more difficult texts
 - providing pupils with home-reading books which are suited to their abilities and are changed regularly.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that school improvement plans set out how teaching and achievement are to be improved and show what will be checked to determine if these aspects of the school are getting better
 - making sure that leaders' judgements on teachers' performance are accurate and closely linked to the progress pupils make
 - providing training for key leaders, including those who lead in English, mathematics and on assessment, to help them contribute effectively to school improvement
 - ensuring that information gained from the checks on pupils' progress is accurate and is used to quickly identify and address underachievement
 - redoubling the efforts to improve attendance.

- Improve the effectiveness of governance by:
 - providing training to develop the skills and knowledge of governors so that they are able to understand for themselves the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and know how well pupils are doing
 - improving the governing body's knowledge of the school's work, its strengths and weaknesses and ensuring that they hold school leaders closely to account for their performance by robust questioning and challenge.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27 to 28 November 2013.

Evidence

I held discussions with the headteacher, a representative from the local authority and with four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. Mary met with a group of senior leaders. We observed teaching in most classes and looked at the results of teaching by scrutinising a random sample of pupils' work from every class. I had a discussion with the school council.

Context

The deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator are both absent due to ill health. There is also a teacher on maternity leave. Since my last visit, a teacher from within the school gained promotion to be the assistant headteacher. A new teacher started in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is improving well, particularly in mathematics and reading. A greater proportion of pupils by the end of the summer term, for example, attained the expected level in phonics (the sounds that letters represent). This result demonstrates good improvement because St Joseph's pupils matched the level of pupils nationally and there was no difference between boys' and girls' attainment. Similarly, there was little difference between the pupils who are known to be eligible to be supported by pupil premium funding and those that are not. (Pupil premium is a grant given to schools by the government depending on the number of pupils whose parents are in the armed forces; the number of pupils who are in the care of the local authority and the number who are known to be eligible for free school meals). There is a daily, well organised phonics session for younger children in which they revise the sounds they have learnt and work on new sounds. In a Year 1 class for example, pupils quickly learnt how to read and spell words with the 'ar' sound. They applied their new knowledge whilst the teacher monitored each pupil carefully to make sure all had understood.

The improvement in reading is also evident in Years 1 and 2 (Key Stage 1). At the end of the summer term in Year 2, a greater proportion of pupils attained the expected Level 2 and a greater proportion attained the higher than expected Level 3 than previously. Pupils say there have been good improvements to how reading is taught and organised. Each class has a dedicated reading corner which pupils talk positively about. In Year 4 for example, some pupils commented positively that the reading corner dedicated to the author Roald Dahl had inspired them to choose library books by the same author to read at home. Pupils in the school council said their books were much better matched to their individual abilities. By the end of Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6), there was a significant increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 4. Across the school, gaps are closing quickly between boys and girls and between those who are supported by the pupil premium and those who are not. A greater proportion of pupils make expected progress in reading than previously.

Although there was a small improvement in pupils' writing by the end of Key Stage 1, there was a significant decline in standards at the end of Year 6. Only just over a half of pupils attained Level 4, which is far fewer than in the previous year. Standards in writing are improving but too slowly. The focus this half term is quite rightly to raise standards in writing quickly. There are, however, significant barriers in place which prevent rapid progress in writing. The first is the unacceptably low standards by the end of Year 2 which makes it exceptionally difficult for teachers in Key Stage 2 to plug the gaps in pupils' learning and develop their writing skills. The second is the way in which writing is taught. Across the school, pupils' writing is hampered because teachers overuse simplistic worksheets which only ask pupils to write a word or phrase or fit an answer on to a short line. The third barrier is the match of the lesson to pupils' abilities in a few classes. In one class for example, a group of pupils who could not write words, phrases or sentences correctly were asked to connect sentences together for their story. The task was too difficult for them and as a result, pupils' progress was stifled.

The biggest improvement has been in mathematics which has been the school's focus since September and which has led to improvement in pupils' progress. In Nursery, the focus was on generating patterns. The activities provided inside and outside of the classroom were interconnected so that children, whichever activity they chose, would learn about patterns. In a tent inside the classroom, for example, children made patterns based on the tops worn by the characters *Peppa Pig and George* from a story; outdoors a group worked with the teacher making a repeating pattern out of leaves and twigs and other children created their own patterns in paint and in pencil. As a result, all children made accelerated progress in their understanding of pattern. Across the school, a higher proportion of pupils make expected progress and a growing proportion make even better progress.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since my last visit, particularly in mathematics. 'Since the new headteacher started she has made teachers make lessons more fun,' said one pupil, a comment with which others agreed. Pupils were particularly complimentary about the weekly mathematics test. Teachers plan their lessons in the week following the weekly test based on any errors that pupils made or any misunderstanding they had about the mathematics. As a result, pupils are making faster progress because the teaching is tailor-made to what they need to learn next.

There have been significant improvements to the opportunities given to pupils to act on advice and feedback from teachers. The school established fix-it time at the start of lessons so that pupils quickly have time to make any corrections from the previous lessons, write a response to the teacher, or answer a new problem or challenge. As a result, pupils feel much more involved in their learning and feel that they can build on their skills from lesson to lesson. One pupil said, 'I like fix-it time because Miss writes comments about what we need to improve and we like writing comments back.'

Another significant improvement is the system of 'assertive mentoring'. Each pupil has a file which sets out their current level of attainment, their targets, and an analysis of how well they are doing at school. There is an analysis, for example, relating to their attendance, punctuality, uniform, presentation of homework and their behaviour. The files are then used for meetings with parents, for discussions with each pupil and for discussions with teachers about the progress individual pupils make. The result is that pupils know precisely what they need to do to improve their work and reach their next level; teachers are held more accountable for the

progress each pupil makes; and parents are involved to a greater extent in their children's learning.

Teaching assistants are more effective. In the better lessons they are used flexibly to work with different groups of pupils whilst the teacher checks on learning in the whole class. In the weaker lessons, teaching assistants are attached continually to the less-able pupils and consequently those pupils do not get taught enough by the teacher. Teaching assistants' performance is now monitored in a similar way to that of teachers which is helping to improve assistants' skills and knowledge. They are programmed to teach support programmes to small groups of pupils who need to catch up on their basic skills. There are signs that this system is working with pupils with special educational needs making better progress and pupils who are supported by the pupil premium.

The quality of pupils' work in books is improving in most classes. There are, however, some concerns about the quality of work in a few classes, particularly in Years 1 and 4. In the better books, there is evidence that the work in English is matched closely to the level of work in other subjects, such as science, geography and history. However, in some classes the work is not well matched and is too low level. This means instead of writing sentences, their ideas or explanations, pupils colour in worksheets, cut and stick pictures in their books or only fill in a word or two. This work is not challenging enough and, as a result, pupils' progress slows. Also, in some classes the work is far too complex for pupils' ability. In one class for example, a pupil who was a poorer reader had to mark a reading text which was of a level pupils in Key Stage 2 would be expected to read.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

By the end of July, pupils' attendance had fallen compared to the previous year and the school fell even further behind other schools nationally. There are signs since September that attendance is beginning to improve. It is on course this year to be close to the national average which is the result of some effective initiatives introduced by staff. Displays of attendance are everywhere around the school. Pupils have been made very aware of the importance of coming to school on time and every day and receive frequent rewards and praise for good attendance. For example, pupils have an individual 'loyalty card' which is stamped for 100% attendance in a week. Once a card is full the pupil becomes a fully qualified attendance ambassador which entitles them to additional treats such as being able to read out the register. Pupils' attendance is tracked and parents are issued with fixed-penalty fines if they do not bring their children to school. These systems are beginning to work and attendance is getting better which is important because if they are not in school teachers cannot teach them.

Pupils' behaviour in classes was mixed during my visit. In the better lessons, pupils were fully involved, interested and captivated. Pupils did say there was some name-calling outside lessons such as picking on others for how they look; or from the country they come from or using the term 'gay' in a derogatory way. However, they said it did not happen often and is always dealt with.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There has been good improvement to leadership and management since my last visit. The school improvement plan has improved significantly. It is more focused, easier to evaluate and has clear links with training. Senior leaders' monitoring of lessons has also improved significantly. The leaders for mathematics for example, wrote a detailed and comprehensive

analysis of the work in pupils' mathematics books and used this effectively to help teachers to improve. She also monitored mathematics lessons using Ofsted's recommendations in surveys. As a result, teaching in mathematics is improving well.

Senior leaders feel empowered by the new headteacher who is making a significant difference to the school and the life chances of pupils. They are more involved in collecting and using data in the subjects they lead to make improvements and as a result they have a clearer view of what needs to be done to improve further. Their enthusiasm and eagerness for change is infectious.

The governing body has taken highly effective action to improve by reducing the number of committees, by investing in training and by finding new governors who can make an effective contribution to the school. They have a better understanding of teaching and are already showing the impact of challenging questions to senior leaders. For example, they challenge senior leaders to think about the timing of mathematics fix-it time in light of some children coming in late to school. As a result, the headteacher altered the school day to make sure all pupils could benefit from this time.

External support

The local authority's support has been effective in helping the school improve its teaching in mathematics. A representative completed a learning review of mathematics and led staff training. As a result, teachers are much clearer about how to enable pupils to make progress in strands of mathematics such as addition and subtraction. These lines of progression are now evident in pupils' work. Teachers' subject knowledge has improved. Similarly the authority has started helping the school to focus on the development of pupils' writing. Meetings to check on how teachers assess pupils' work have been effective because teachers' assessments, according to the local authority, are more accurate.