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28 February 2014

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 to your school on 26 and 27 February 2014, 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 third 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 appoint a maximum of two 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 and 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 third monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 February 2014

Evidence

I held discussions with five governors, a representative of the local authority, the headteacher and with senior leaders. I also had a discussion with pupils from the school council. During the inspection, I observed teaching in 11 classes accompanied by either the headteacher or the assistant headteacher. I looked through some pupils' books in each of the year groups.

Context

The deputy headteacher, absent at my last monitoring inspection, remains on long-term sick leave. A teacher who is a member of the senior leadership team returned from maternity leave. A Year 4 teacher on a short-term contract left the school in December; the class is now being taught by the supply teacher who previously covered the maternity leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is improving. They are making quicker progress than in the past, which means a greater proportion of pupils are on track to attain the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils who spoke to me said they read more often at home and at school. They said that the books are now more challenging and are a better match to their reading abilities. They also said there is a wider range of books to read, which include mysteries, adventures, non-fiction and humorous texts. According to the school's assessment information, over half of pupils in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 have, so far this school year, made better than expected progress in reading. The school has worked hard to close any gaps between the attainments of groups of pupils. For example, in Year 6 there is only a small difference between the reading abilities of boys and girls and also between the reading abilities of pupils supported by the pupil premium and those that are not.

Staff have worked hard to improve the teaching of writing, which was an issue of concern that I raised in my last report. Pupils' attainment has risen in most classes and the gap between their ability to read and their ability to write is closing. The pupils who spoke to me said they can now write longer pieces of writing and they do so each week. They also said their writing was challenging and they know exactly what they need to do to improve their work.

Pupils who spoke to me were highly complimentary about the teaching of mathematics. In addition to daily activities to improve their basic number skills, they are given weekly assessments, and the results are used by teachers to plan the following week's work. This means that pupils, during the week, complete activities

that are based on fixing the errors they made in the assessments or challenging them further to complete more difficult work. As a result pupils' standards in mathematics are catching up to where they should be for their age.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. Teachers' expectations of the quality and the quantity of pupils' work have increased. Teachers' main focus, since my last visit, has been on improving writing. Evidence in pupils' books and in the school's assessments shows that the quality of pupils' writing is improving quickly. When I spoke to pupils they said this was mainly because they have very clear targets to achieve and work on each week. One pupil, for example, mentioned he had been working on trying to improve his use of commas in his work and, now he has achieved it, he has a new target to work on. Pupils said they write every day, improve and edit their work and then produce a final longer piece of writing at the end of the week. The key to the improvement is the teachers' very clear marking after a piece of work and the way in which teachers follow up the marking in the following week to enable pupils to improve.

At the start of lessons, pupils have enough time to respond to teachers' feedback on their work. Pupils have the opportunity to fix any errors they have made or to think about more difficult challenges posed by the teacher. As a result pupils said they feel more involved in their own progress. In a few cases, the adults marking the work have used incorrect spelling or punctuation. The marking in some year groups is of high quality, such as in Years 3 and 6, and pupils use the marking to make better progress.

The content of lessons has improved. In mathematics, lessons are based on the needs of pupils, which are identified each week during assessments. In one example, the teacher planned an effective lesson on angles and taught pupils how to use a protractor because in the assessment they had struggled to measure angles accurately. In another lesson, the teacher planned activities to help pupils when calculating with money because pupils found difficulty in working with different values of coins. There is still some way to go to make sure that the activities pupils are given deepen or widen their understanding or take them on to the next stage in their learning. This is because, in a few lessons, after my observation, I was unclear as to what exactly they had learnt and what they did not already know.

Teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge needs further improvement. A few adults, for example, used poor spoken standard English throughout the lesson. A few adults did not have the subject knowledge they needed to identify the reasons behind the errors pupils were making in their work or to deepen their understanding.

There has been an improvement in the quality of adults' and teachers' demonstrations and explanations during lessons. However, there is still further work

to do to improve the way in which they model to pupils what to do and how to be successful in the lesson.

Pupils who spoke to me were complimentary about the teaching of mathematics, reading, writing and science. They felt that the teaching of physical education needed to be improved, so I will check on this in my next inspection.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attendance is improving and is currently close to the national average. The number of pupils who are absent for long periods of time has reduced considerably from 20 to nine.

The headteacher changed the policy and procedures in November and detention is not used with young children to punish lateness or absence. The pupils I spoke to felt the behaviour system was clear and fair. They also said that behaviour and attitudes in class were improving. Despite this, similar to my last visit, pupils said that there is some name calling based on pupils' appearance, such as if they wear glasses, if they have ginger hair or if they have different skin colour. They also mentioned that a few pupils use the term 'that's so gay' to mean something unpleasant or rubbish, and use racist terms. Pupils clarified that these things do not happen much and adults deal with them well when they occur. Nonetheless, improvement in these aspects is needed and I will look into these issues in more depth in my next inspection.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The impact of leadership is improving rapidly. The English leader, for example, has observed lessons, scrutinised teachers' planning and collected and collated pupils' views. These were then used effectively to improve the teaching of reading. The evaluation indicated that pupils did not read widely or often in the past. As a result the English leader introduced a reading challenge, which is very popular with the pupils I spoke to and has resulted in pupils reading more often and a wider range of books.

The headteacher has unlocked the potential of teaching staff to lead subjects and improve teaching. The teacher who leads the teaching of information and communication technology, for example, is making impressive changes to the curriculum and to teaching. She has a long-term view of how to improve pupils' achievement in the subject. In her own Year 1 class, pupils made good progress in using tablet computers to record information in block graphs. Their work was then uploaded to a virtual 'cloud' which could be accessed and recalled by scanning a code printed into pupils' books.

The monitoring and judgement of pupils' progress has improved through using a more detailed and effective observation form, which enables leaders to identify

precisely what progress pupils have made. As a result the monitoring of pupils' progress is more accurate.

The quality of governance has improved further. Instead of being the receivers of information, governors are now asking for the information and data to make decisions. There is also an improved focus on value for money and the impact on pupils' progress in the decisions that they make. The quality of challenge and support has also improved, as one governor commented, 'We are getting bolder in our questions.'

External support

The local authority's support to improve teachers' leadership of subjects and different aspects of the school has been effective. As a result, the leaders for subjects such as mathematics, English and parts of the school such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) are more involved in evaluating the quality of teaching and taking decisions about how to improve further.

Frequent visits from the local authority advisors have been effective in improving the teaching of writing as well as the teaching of individual teachers.

The local authority has also provided valuable support to help the school through difficulties associated with long-term absence and weak teaching.