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9 March 2012

Mrs C Smith
Headteacher
The Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School
Cotterill
Halton Brook
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 2NL

Dear Mrs Smith

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 March 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2011. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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, the Director of Shrewsbury Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 11 October 2011

- Raise attainment and accelerate the progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, by:
 - setting out appropriately challenging and ambitious expectations for pupils' progress and attainment
 - ensuring, through rigorous and effective monitoring, that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better and that learning is supported by an appropriate pace in all lessons
 - ensuring that the curriculum is designed effectively to support rapid improvements in pupils' basic skills
 - improving consistency in the quality of marking, so that it always gives pupils clear guidance on the next steps they need to take to improve their work.

- Raise attainment and improve the progress made by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that provision in the Reception class is sharply focused on learning.

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of strategic planning for improvement, by defining precise success criteria in the school development plan, so that the impact of actions can be measured accurately to provide an overview of the school's performance.

- Improve pupils' attendance.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, pupils' books and information on pupils' attainment and progress. She observed eight lessons led by six teachers. Meetings were held with senior leaders and managers, staff, pupils, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority, the local leader of education and a group of six parents and carers.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2011, a part-time teacher has taken up post. A local leader in education has been appointed to work with the school for the equivalent of two days each week. The local authority and the Diocese have appointed two additional governors to the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils enjoy school. They are willing to work hard even when activities lack challenge. In a Year 6 English lesson, all pupils were engrossed in writing a letter to express their concern about longer school days. They used formal language well and were willing to review and redraft their writing to ensure it captured the correct tone. Pupils displayed exceptional attitudes as they took ownership of their own learning and worked with high levels of concentration to achieve success. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books indicate this is not typical learning on a day-to-day basis. Not all pupils are making rapid enough progress because tasks are insufficiently matched to their needs and often lack challenge.

Pupils' achievement is beginning to improve. Although attainment remains low in all year groups, more pupils are beginning to reach age-related expectations. In Years 2 and 6, a considerable number of pupils are making rapid progress. Some pupils have already made the amount of progress normally expected by the end of the academic year. However, this is not a consistent picture across the whole school. While most pupils are making expected progress from their starting points, not enough are making the accelerated progress required to remedy previous underachievement. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs make variable progress across the school. Despite a wide range of intervention strategies, this group makes weaker progress in reading and writing.

Achievement in reading is improving because pupils have regular opportunities to develop their knowledge of the sounds letters make and they are able to read for pleasure and

understanding. Pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics is weaker because there is an over-reliance on worksheets which limit pupils' ability to extend their skills. A renewed whole-school focus on reading and writing across the curriculum is beginning to lead to better opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills in other subjects. Nonetheless, the significant gaps many pupils have in their handwriting, punctuation and number skills are not being tackled consistently. Pupils are receiving greater guidance on how to improve their work because the whole-school marking policy has been renewed and is being applied consistently. In writing, many pupils receive helpful feedback but they have limited opportunity to act on this advice. In some classes, teachers' marking is overgenerous. This means pupils receive too much praise for work that is not of an acceptable standard for their age or capabilities.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment and accelerate the progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

Teaching is beginning to improve because teachers are striving to implement new techniques and are becoming more aware of what pupils can achieve. Teachers plan interesting activities and seek to make learning purposeful through links with everyday life. All teaching is characterised by warm and trusting relationships because teachers provide ample opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively. Nonetheless, teaching is not good enough on a day-to-day basis to accelerate pupils' progress. Teachers' planning lacks precision and assessment information is not used well enough to match activities to pupils' needs and capabilities. In some lessons, activities are too low-level and do not move learning on quickly enough.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is beginning to improve because the environment has been reorganised to enable more purposeful learning activities. Children are becoming more enthusiastic about their learning because planning is taking greater account of their needs and interests. Consequently, achievement is beginning to rise, although children's skills and knowledge are still much lower than is typical for their age. However, learning opportunities are not always seized and too few children show an interest in reading or writing when they work independently. This is because the indoor space is limited. Although the teacher is striving to provide interesting activities, children are not always aware of what can be accessed. This means their learning sometimes becomes aimless. The outdoor area is not used well enough to develop children's learning. The quality of adult intervention is variable. During adult-led activities questions are used well to extend children's thinking. This is less effective when children are working independently.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment and improve the progress made by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that provision in the Reception class is sharply focused on learning – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' absence is being tackled with vigour. New incentives to reward good attendance and better guidance to parents and carers on absence levels are having a positive impact. As a result, attendance rates have improved since the previous inspection, moving from well-below average to broadly in line. Some groups of pupils, particularly those known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs, do not attend school regularly enough. This is contributing to their variable progress across the school.

Pupils are polite and friendly. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils show respect and consideration to each other and to adults. A key feature of all lessons is the cooperative manner in which they work and their willingness to share ideas and listen to others. They often spontaneously clap each other because they are genuinely pleased about each other's success. This behaviour makes a significant contribution to a well-ordered, welcoming and safe school. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying or name-calling rarely happens. They have full confidence in the adults who care for them to resolve any issues they raise.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve pupils' attendance – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and managers, members of the governing body and staff have united in their shared determination to tackle the significant weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Consequently, there is a common sense of purpose and much has been done to establish a solid foundation to secure improvement. Whole-school expectations have been raised because the school is using national benchmarks to set challenging targets for all pupils. School improvement planning is better because there is a sharper focus on pupils' outcomes and the school has a clearer understanding of how to measure success. Members of the governing body are beginning to offer greater challenge to senior leaders because of their attendance at a regular scrutiny committee. Parents and carers are positive about the school and keen to contribute to its improvement.

Improvements to the systems for monitoring pupils' achievement mean school leaders and managers have a better understanding of the progress all pupils are making. However, this is not being used well enough to identify the achievement gaps between groups. Leadership and management of teaching and learning are becoming more effective because teaching is observed more regularly and teachers are receiving sharper feedback to help them improve their practice. Although senior leaders and managers have provided good opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to see good practice, not enough attention has been given to establishing clear whole-school expectations for teaching and learning. Insufficient attention

has been given to checking pupils' books which means low expectations and poor standards of work are still evident in some classes. Subject leaders are becoming increasingly involved in driving whole-school improvement through monitoring activities and whole-school training. They have an accurate understanding of weaknesses and have appropriate plans to tackle these areas. The role of the special educational needs coordinator is underdeveloped because there are too few opportunities to check provision and outcomes.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and effectiveness of strategic planning for improvement, by defining precise success criteria in the school development plan, so that the impact of actions can be measured accurately to provide an overview of the school's performance – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action has been evaluated and required some amendments. These have been addressed and it is now fit-for-purpose. External support has been effective because it is matched well to the school's needs. Additional funding means the school has accessed external consultants to support improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The link with the local leader in education has helped teachers to improve their practice, while senior leaders have been supported well in developing the systems to check on the work of the school. The capacity of the governing body is being developed through the support and guidance provided by the additional governors appointed by the local authority and the Diocese.