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7 December 2012

Mrs Christine 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 5 and 6 December 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 third 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 Strategic Director of Children and Enterprise for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



Annex

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate the progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or 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 third monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 December 2012

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed nine lessons led by six teachers. Two of these were joint observations with the headteacher. The inspector also made shorter visits to classrooms to evaluate the teaching of reading and learning in other subject areas. Meetings were held with school leaders and managers, members of the governing body, pupils, a local authority representative, the local leader in education, the School Improvement Partner and three parents. The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation including school improvement planning, information on pupils' achievement and pupils' books.

Context

Additional funding received from the government for some pupils has been used to employ a full-time equivalent teacher so most pupils are taught in single-age groups during morning sessions. A new teaching assistant has been employed in the Reception class to cover maternity leave. A new staff governor has taken up post.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The unvalidated 2012 results are the best the school has gained in many years. These results demonstrate a marked improvement in pupils' achievement. Although standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 remain lower than the national average, this gap is closing quickly. Previously, Year 6 pupils left school a year behind in their learning. This is no longer the case as pupils moved into Year 7 less than one term behind other pupils nationally. More pupils reached the expected standard in English and mathematics but not enough gained the higher levels.

Pupils' achievement in other year groups is beginning to mirror this success. Most pupils are making expected progress from their starting points and many more are working at the levels expected for their age. Nonetheless, some pupils are not making rapid enough progress which means standards remain low in some classes. Achievement in reading is improving. Pupils are reading with increasing fluency because their knowledge of phonics (the sounds letters make) is much stronger. Gaps in pupils' basic skills are steadily being eradicated. Nonetheless, spelling remains a whole-school weakness. The progress of some pupils is hampered because they do not have a secure understanding of simple number facts. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs are making similar progress to their peers, although their attainment remains low.

Pupils work hard and enjoy their lessons. Their aspirations are rising and they are very keen to succeed. Older pupils are keenly aware they need to do well in school so they can go on to further education and gain the job they want.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The quality of teaching

Teachers have much higher expectations of themselves and the pupils in their care. This is reflected in the way they plan lively lessons to capture pupils' interests and the purposeful learning environments they have created. Teachers are increasingly skilled at seizing every opportunity to reinforce prior learning. This is because they have a much sharper understanding of gaps in pupils' learning and a greater awareness of the progress pupils need to make to reach their potential. Teachers want to improve and eagerly take on board feedback about their performance. As a result, teaching is becoming stronger on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless, it is not yet consistently good and there are too few examples of outstanding teaching. This is because some teachers do not always check carefully on pupils' learning throughout lessons and the activities they design are not always pitched quite right. This means some pupils occasionally find tasks too easy or too difficult.

The reinvigorated curriculum is underpinning the school's drive to tackle weaknesses in basic skills. English and mathematics have a high priority so pupils have greater opportunities to use their reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects. Teachers' marking continues to be thorough but pupils do not always have enough chance to respond to the guidance teachers provide.

Reception children are making greater gains in their learning because the environment and the teaching they receive has moved on a pace. A sharper understanding of pupils' starting points and an increased ambition for what children can achieve means learning opportunities are more tightly focused and purposeful. Consequently, children left Reception at the end of the academic year well equipped to cope with the demands of Year 1. The children who started in September have settled quickly and are already beginning to read, write and solve simple number calculations independently. This is due to higher expectations from teachers and a stronger partnership between adults. There are more opportunities to use the outdoor environment. Nonetheless, children are not gaining maximum benefit from this resource because learning sessions are sometimes too adult-directed. Planning is not flexible enough to allow children to explore all the areas of learning throughout the school day.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to behave well in lessons and around the school. Their increasingly positive attitudes to learning mean they are taking more responsibility for their own behaviour. In short, they behave well because they are interested in their learning and want to do well, rather than just obeying the school rules or because they want to please their teachers. Pupils say bullying hardly ever happens in their school and they are confident any issues they bring to adults are sorted out. Older pupils are developing a clear understanding of different types of bullying, but they are not fully aware of the harm homophobic name-calling can cause.

Attendance improved by the end of the academic year and almost matched the national average. Records show the school is increasingly effective at tackling most types of absence. However, despite the governing body's strong stance on family holidays during term time, this is the key reason for the school's attendance figures falling during the first part of the school year. Punctuality continues to improve, so more pupils are gaining maximum benefit from their time in school.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve pupils' attendance – good

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school is steadily transforming due to the calm but authoritative leadership of the headteacher. The increasingly confident senior leaders are making a considerable contribution to the school's improvement journey, despite the relatively short time they have been in post. This cohesive leadership group is sensitively driving a change in culture, developing a 'can do' attitude among staff and pupils. Nevertheless, these key leaders are shouldering too much of the responsibility for securing the school's recovery. The governing body continues to develop its role as a critical partner as governors visit lessons to gain an overview of teaching and meet with subject leaders to discuss the school's progress. However, there is scope for governors to offer greater challenge about the achievement of different groups of pupils across the school.

Teaching is checked frequently and the judgements made by senior leaders are accurate and match inspection evidence. Nonetheless, the feedback teachers receive is not always precise enough to help them identify what they need to do to improve further. The systems to manage teachers' performance are becoming more rigorous as pay rewards are beginning to be linked to outcomes for pupils. The school is increasingly effective at identifying its own weaknesses and planning appropriate actions to tackle underachievement. Consequently, the pace of change is not overly reliant on external advice and guidance. The improved tracking system means the school has a secure grasp on the progress individual pupils make. However, the systems for using school-based data to drive improvement, to check on the impact of actions and to keep governors fully informed on pupil outcomes across the school are not firmly established. Discussion with parents and scrutiny of the school's own

parental questionnaires indicate parents are very positive about the school's progress and are supportive of the actions being taken to bring about recovery.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area 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 – good

External support

External support for the school continues to be of good quality. The School Improvement Partner knows the school well and is offering astute guidance about the school's next steps. The link with the Local Leader in Education is making a real difference to the school's success. This relationship is becoming more of a partnership as senior leaders are less reliant on direction. Improved advice from external consultants means the school has received quality support to improve the achievement of more-able pupils and pupils with special educational needs.