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8 December 2015

Mrs Binks
Acting Executive Headteacher
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe
Garburn Place
Newton Aycliffe
County Durham
DL5 7DE

Dear Mrs Binks

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School.

Following my visit with James Hannah, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 November 2015, 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 March 2015. 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 Durham County Council.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2015

- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements
 - improving the rigour with which safeguarding incidents are tracked, monitored and reported and ensuring that all staff undertake regular safeguarding training and are confident in reporting incidents
 - ensuring that middle leaders monitor teaching and learning rigorously so that pupils' progress improves rapidly
 - enhancing action plans for further improvement and using them to hold staff rigorously accountable for pupils' progress
 - improving the effectiveness of the systems for managing the provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs
 - making certain that additional support for disadvantaged pupils, those who speak English as an additional language and pupils with disabilities and special educational needs has a positive impact on learning in all year groups
 - developing the skills of governors so that they are able to challenge the school, using information on the performance of all pupils, and make better checks on safeguarding procedures
 - improving the curriculum for safety so that pupils have better knowledge of how to stay safe online and of the basic laws in Britain
 - ensuring staff in the early years receive regular, effective training and opportunities for development
 - ensuring provision in the early years, and throughout the school, to support children who speak English as an additional language is checked carefully.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to make sure that all groups of pupils across all year groups make at least good progress, by:
 - ensuring that work is set at an appropriate level of difficulty so that all pupils including the most able are appropriately challenged
 - giving all pupils clear feedback on their work and ensuring they respond to teachers' comments
 - supporting those pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, within class, to close any gaps in their achievement with their peers and in comparison to national expectations
 - improving the quality of pupils' writing and their handwriting, particularly in Key Stage 2.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring strategies to manage behaviour are applied consistently across the school and that the way teachers use these strategies to reduce low-level disruption in lessons is improved
 - improving systems for managing behaviour outside of lessons

- responding promptly to pupils' concerns about name calling or bullying.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 November 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting executive headteacher, acting head of school, senior and middle leaders, governors, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese. Inspectors visited classrooms, spoke with parents and pupils and looked at their work.

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has left the school. New arrangements, including an acting executive headteacher and acting head of school, have been established for the academic year. A new governing body has been constituted following the break-up of the federation arrangements with another school.

Outcomes for pupils

School leaders have rightly focused on making sure that they have an accurate understanding of what pupils can currently do, what they need to do next to improve their learning and to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments regularly. Systems have been put in place to ensure that they, and teachers, have an accurate view of all pupils' starting points in this school year. Leaders now have a secure and accurate benchmark from which to build. School leaders do not, however, have a detailed view of the progress pupils are currently making in the school. This is because information is limited and systems are not fully in place to track pupils' progress. Currently, insufficient information is available to be analysed in detail about those making expected or better-than-expected progress for different groups of pupils. It is difficult to compare the rates of progress for those that need to catch up quickly. School leaders recognise the need to address this as a matter of urgency in order to help them better understand the impact their actions are having on improving teaching. This aspect will be a key focus of the next HMI monitoring inspection.

Evidence seen by inspectors confirms the school's view that pupils are now making better progress in their lessons and this can also be seen in some of their books. For example, pupils now have opportunities to write at length. The quality of their handwriting and presentation has improved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils engage more with their learning and know what they need to do to improve their work. They welcome the greater challenge now posed by teachers. This is because school leaders have had success in improving teaching due to the support and training for teachers, along with monitoring systems put in place to check the quality of practice in classrooms and pupils' books. This has helped to improve the

pace of learning in lessons and has raised teachers' expectations of what good learning should be. Evidence seen by inspectors shows that more work is needed to fully challenge some pupils, especially the most able.

Teaching Assistants are increasingly effective in their support for individuals and groups of learners. They have received training to enhance their practice in working with children with disabilities, special educational needs and English as an additional language. In addition, they have had a basic skills audit to check their language and mathematics skills. As a result, they are deployed more effectively in classrooms and provide additional interventions for pupils that require them.

School leaders, including subject leaders, are developing opportunities across the curriculum to use and apply skills in mathematics and writing in a range of subjects. Pupils' learning is better supported by teachers' use of questions in lessons to extend pupils' thinking and a more effective system for checking their work and giving them feedback. The progress made by pupils is increasingly evident in their books and so is the pupils' willingness to engage in the lesson. These improvements are not fully embedded in all classrooms.

The new system for tracking pupils' attainment is increasingly effective in helping leaders hold teachers to account. Teachers use the information to plan learning and better match tasks to individuals' needs. This use of data related to the new curriculum is in the early stages of development and work is ongoing to ensure that the assessments teachers make are always accurate. Teachers have a clearer understanding of the progress pupils are making in lessons and the need to plan lessons which engage and stimulate learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour of pupils in lessons has been transformed. The introduction of a new 'take five' behaviour policy is well liked and understood by pupils and teachers. It is applied consistently across the school. Lessons are more stimulating and teachers better match activities to the individual needs of the pupil. As a consequence, there is a peaceful and settled atmosphere in classrooms, pupils concentrate better and are more engaged with learning. They have fewer tendencies to be distracted. Pupils are increasingly encouraged to help and support each other. For example, the school has introduced a number of 'Polish Ambassadors'. These are pupils who can translate for other pupils and help induct children that are new to the school.

Pupils play well together and enjoy their playtimes. Incidents of name calling and fighting are now rare. If they do happen, they are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Pupils respond well to directions given by adults and teachers. As a result, they move around school in an orderly fashion and are ready to start lessons in the right frame of mind. The recording, tracking and analysis of pupil behaviour are underdeveloped. As a result, school leaders have limited information on how well behaviour is improving for groups of pupils and what they may need to do next to

improve matters further. On occasions, pupils are forgetful of their manners and can be over familiar with visitors.

Pupils and parents have a growing confidence that the school manages behaviour well and that bullying is rare. Pupils have a growing understanding of different forms of bullying and of how to keep themselves safe online.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

School leaders, including governors, are now moving the school's improvement forward more rapidly. This is because the capacity for leadership has been strengthened and stabilised. Evidence from senior and middle leaders' monitoring is used well to check that systems in place are having a positive impact on learning. In addition, the school has developed effective leadership capacity to ensure that procedures for the safeguarding of pupils are secure. Parents have an increasing confidence that the new leadership arrangements are making a difference to the school and the education that their children are receiving.

Middle leaders in the school are beginning to take on more responsibility and are becoming more involved in monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility. Their monitoring now includes work and data scrutiny and involvement in meetings with teachers about the progress the pupils who they teach are making. As a result, the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and middle leaders are increasingly blurred and further refinement of roles and responsibilities is required to ensure clarity and accountability.

Staff, governors and pupils believe that the school has improved, with a sharper focus on improving pupils' learning and behaviour. Systems to ensure that the performance of teachers is closely monitored and targets are set for improving classroom practice have been established. Staff are well supported and challenged and held more directly to account.

Governors have a sharper focus on school improvement and are more effective in holding school leaders to account. Following the de-federation of governance with a neighbouring school, they have reviewed their own strengths and identified actions to address any weaknesses. They have established a school review group alongside the local authority and diocese that meets on a monthly basis. They take reports from senior and middle leaders on the impact that actions to improve the school are having. As a consequence, they have a realistic and detailed understanding of the school, the actions being taken to improve the school and the challenges that remain. A review of how additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is being spent has been undertaken but not yet completed. Governors recognise the need to act on the recommendations from the review as a matter of urgency.

External support

The local authority and diocese have acted quickly, working hand in hand to ensure that leadership arrangements have been stabilised for the academic year and that governance arrangements have a sharper focus on the challenges faced by the school. They provide significant levels of challenge and support to school leaders and governors through the School Scrutiny Group (SSG). In addition, the local authority carries out regular reviews of teaching and the standards being achieved by pupils, and reports directly to the governors through the SSG. Additional support includes visits to review action planning and inputs from consultants, including early years. As a result, the local authority and diocese know the school well and what it needs to do to improve.