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14 March 2013

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 12 and 13 March 2013, 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 fourth 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed to any year group.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 March 2013

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed six lessons led by six teachers. Two of these were joint observations with the headteacher. The inspector also made shorter visits to classrooms and the Nurture Room to observe teaching and learning. 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 the school improvement plan, information on pupils' achievement and pupils' books.

Context

Two teachers and the office manager have been on long-term absence since the beginning of the spring term. One class is being covered by a temporary teacher. The school's part-time teacher has temporarily increased her hours and is teaching the Year 5 and 6 class.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is steadily improving. Although standards remain lower than the national average in most year groups, the gap is narrowing and more pupils are working at the levels expected for their age. Pupils' achievement is stronger in Key Stage 2, with many pupils making faster progress from their below average starting points. This means some of the oldest pupils in the school have already made the progress expected by the end of the academic year. Nonetheless, this positive picture is not reflected in all year groups and there is too much variation between subjects. Although improving, achievement in reading is weaker than writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 and not enough pupils reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) screening check.

The achievement gap between boys and girls is closing and pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals are making similar and sometimes better progress than their peers. The achievement of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs is too varied. Some of these pupils are making good gains in their learning and keeping pace with their classmates. However, this is not the case in all classrooms and too many pupils who need extra help with their learning are not making enough progress. Consequently, this group is underachieving. Pupils who attend the Nurture group are making positive strides in their personal development and readiness for learning.

Teachers' persistence in developing basic skills is helping many pupils to write fluently, present their work clearly and use punctuation and grammar accurately. This means the

number of pupils with gaps in their learning is reducing over time. A new programme to improve spelling has not been in place long enough to make a significant difference to weakness in pupils' spelling skills. Speaking and listening skills are improving because teachers provide ample opportunities for pupils to think through their ideas, share their thoughts with partners and present their finished work to the whole class.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area 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

Inadequate teaching is firmly in the past and good teaching is becoming the norm rather than the exception. Warm relationships, purposeful classrooms and higher expectations underpin positive learning environments which are helping many more pupils to thrive. Nonetheless, not all teaching matches the best and some still requires improvement to help pupils make the best progress possible. Ensuring teachers match work to pupils' individual needs continues to be the key stumbling block in gaining consistently strong teaching across the school. Teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to reflect on the feedback they receive in their books, although there is scope to develop this further.

Teachers are exploiting opportunities to develop pupils' basic skills in other subjects. For example, in a Year 5 and 6 lesson pupils put their reading, writing and information communication and technology skills to good use to produce high quality presentations about Ancient Egypt which they confidently shared with the whole class. Activities such as these are making learning fun and relevant.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is becoming increasingly strong. This is because the Early Years Foundation Stage leader has acted on advice and developed a deeper understanding of how young children learn effectively. As a result, activities are linking to children's interests and they have greater freedom to select from a wider range of learning opportunities. The outdoor area is becoming a much richer environment to support learning. Children are enthusiastic about these changes and are relishing the opportunity to choose whether to work indoors or outside. However, some children are finding it more difficult to get used to this flexible approach which means they do not sustain interest in their chosen activity for long enough. Adults are directing their own training and using the time and resources available to them to enhance the environment and improve their questioning skills. As a result, they are becoming a more cohesive and effective team.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area 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 are keen to talk to visitors and share their work because they are proud of their school. Their positive attitudes to learning; their considerate behaviour and their rising aspirations make a strong contribution to the school's drive for improvement. Pupils work well together and listen to each other. Older pupils are developing very mature attitudes. This means no learning time is lost and they happily accept feedback from their class mates to help them improve their work. Pupils say behaviour is typically good in school. They think weak behaviour is dealt with quickly so it is not allowed to get in the way of their learning. They are becoming increasingly aware of the harm racist and homophobic name calling can cause and they know this type of behaviour is not acceptable.

Pupils' attendance at this point in the year is higher than it was at this time last year and the year before. Absence rates are decreasing faster than the national picture, but attendance still remains low in comparison to other schools. The school has been successful in reducing the number of absences caused by family holidays during term time. Nonetheless, there are still too many pupils who miss large chunks of their schooling.

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

- improve pupils' attendance – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Staff absence has been exceptionally well managed. Senior leaders have held firm and maintained a sharp focus on school priorities so that pupils' achievement and teaching are continuing to improve. Teachers who form part of the subject teams have continued to deliver on their planned actions despite missing key members of their group. This signals a positive shift in the school's capacity to improve. Systems are embedded, roles are understood and improvement is not heavily reliant on one or two leaders and managers. The headteacher has the unwavering commitment and confidence of the staff. Consequently, morale is high, the team remains united and the shared determination to secure improvement pervades the whole school.

Checks on the quality of teaching happen frequently and teachers are benefiting from sharper feedback and clear targets so they know what they need to do to take their practice to the next level. However, not enough attention has been given to monitoring how well phonics is being taught to ensure more Year 1 pupils gain success in the forthcoming screening check. Stronger systems are in place to capture pupils' achievement information which is helping senior leaders have a better view of how different groups perform across the school. There is scope for more-rigorous evaluation of this data so that leaders can pinpoint more precisely where they need to target their work. The school improvement plan captures senior leaders' high ambition for the school; although the criteria to measure success are not always sharp enough to help governors gain an accurate view of the school's progress.

The special educational needs coordinator has successfully reviewed the special educational needs register to ensure a clear distinction between pupils who are underachieving and pupils who have specific learning needs. Better use of data means she has identified the slow progress of some pupils as an area requiring urgent attention. However, the action to tackle this weakness is at the earliest stages of development.

Recent training has reinvigorated members of the governing body and enhanced their understanding of roles and responsibilities. Governors know the questions they need to ask senior leaders to help them gain an accurate understanding of the school's progress. However, they do not ask these challenging questions regularly enough. Governors are keen to improve further so their effectiveness does not lag behind improvements in other areas of the school. They have plans to audit their skills and use this information to identify what steps they need to take to become stronger.

Parents and carers remain supportive and are positive about the school's improvement. They are keen to see greater opportunities for visits and visitors to school to enrich the curriculum further.

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 – satisfactory

External support

The school is taking greater ownership of the amount and nature of the support they require. It continues to benefit from the valued and valuable advice it receives from the School Improvement Partner. Regular meetings with local authority officers are supporting the school in keeping track of its progress and making sure it has the right support. Links with the local leader in education have been scaled down as senior leaders become more confident in checking the effectiveness of the school. However, this support strategy is still firmly established and plans with the partnership school are underway for teachers from both schools to work together to check their assessments of pupils' work.