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14 March 2014

Natasha Scott
Headteacher
St Francis' Catholic Primary School
Maryland Park
London
E15 1HB

Dear Ms Scott

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Francis' Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Erwin, Additional inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 March 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 January 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 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, the Director of Children's Services for Newham and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' attainment by:
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations and set work which matches pupils' different learning needs
 - making sure teachers talk less in lessons and provide more opportunities for pupils to work by themselves so that they remain involved in their work and behaviour improves
 - ensuring lessons move at a brisk pace and that more-able pupils are suitably challenged to reach higher levels of attainment
 - encouraging more-able pupils in Years 5 and 6 to read more challenging texts
 - ensuring that reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively across the school.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - making sure all leaders, especially subject leaders, have the necessary skills to check on pupils' progress and know what needs to be improved and how to hold teachers to account
 - making sure that the school's policies for marking and managing behaviour are implemented consistently
 - ensuring there are systems to accurately measure pupils' progress, and that these are used to highlight how different groups and individuals are achieving, and to promote rapid improvements
 - developing plans for improvement with suitable timescales and clear criteria against which success can be measured
 - fully implementing procedures for managing the performance of staff so that teaching becomes securely good for all pupils
 - strengthening systems for engaging with parents and carers so they express greater confidence in the school
 - ensuring the governing body is able to perform its duties effectively and, in particular, to hold leaders to account more rigorously.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally with staff and pupils during the course of the inspection.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, two teachers have left and been replaced by staff on a temporary contract. The deputy headteacher has been absent for several weeks this term. An additional teacher has been appointed for four and a half days each week to provide support for specific groups of pupils. Two new members of support staff have joined Year 1 and the Reception Year.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's information shows that more pupils are working at the levels expected for their age. Nonetheless, gaps in the attainment of different groups remain. For example, gaps between boys and girls are still noticeable, as are those for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those that are not. The school's information also shows that some pupils are making rapid progress, while others are not. It is clear that younger pupils are not making as much progress as they need to if they are to reach the levels of attainment expected for their age. Most pupils in Year 6 are on track to make the progress expected of them from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. Much of this progress has been made this academic year.

In lessons, inspectors observed some pupils making good progress, particularly at the top of the school where teaching is strong. Reading skills and the love of reading are promoted more strongly around the school. Pupils are learning to edit their written work to improve it and to reduce the number of errors. However, they do not do this routinely. More pupils are responding to the teachers' marking of written work, although some inconsistency remains. In mathematics, close attention to the way pupils set out their work is helping to reduce errors as pupils develop skills in calculation. Sometimes, however, pupils follow a method for calculation without really understanding or being able to explain why. The best levels of achievement are underpinned by good understanding of the rationale behind the method being used.

The quality of teaching

Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching is leading to training for teachers that is helping the quality to improve. Weaknesses noted previously are not so widespread. More examples of good teaching in lessons are helping pupils to make better progress over time. Pockets of good teaching can be usefully shared but the quality is still too variable overall.

What has improved noticeably, since the last inspection, is the environment for learning. High expectations of the pace of work from pupils and well-established routines that promote good learning behaviour have a positive effect on the pupils' attitudes to learning. This has been a focus since the last inspection and the impact is evident.

Teachers' marking is better than previously and more pupils are responding to the comments. A few lessons observed by inspectors started with opportunities for pupils to respond to the teacher's marking of work from the day before. However, some comments are a little imprecise about what can be done to improve the work. Marking is stronger in writing than in mathematics. Although teachers occasionally refer to pupils' targets during lessons, such targets are sometimes generic and not individualised to pupils' work; nor is it clear how targets will raise the levels of pupils' work. Some teachers give pupils opportunities to check their own work or that of their classmates. This strategy is helpful in making pupils more aware of what needs to improve in their work but, again, is not used consistently.

Staff have worked hard to raise the importance of reading across the school. Guided reading sessions are an essential part of each day in all classes from Years 1 to 6. The activities for the groups of pupils working with an adult are generally well planned and focused to promote key reading skills. For pupils working without an adult, activities are not always worthwhile or focused on promoting reading.

Support from the local authority and a local outstanding school has helped staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to improve the quality and range of purposeful activities for children. The quality is not consistent across all parts of the provision or throughout the day. The focus on writing in Reception Year is bearing fruit with children making clear progress in using their knowledge of letters and sounds to write simple words and phrases. The quality of assessment is still too variable and must improve quickly. There are wide differences in the quality, frequency and regularity of the observations and records of children's learning and development across the seven areas of learning, depending on who is their key person. This level of variability is not acceptable and this criticism was made at the last monitoring inspection.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since the previous inspection, there has been a sea change in pupils' attitudes to learning. They respond positively to teachers' higher expectations in lessons. Pupils are keen to learn and keen to show what they know to inspectors. They work together effectively. Older pupils show a growing independence and love of learning. They actively support each other's learning and seek out additional challenges in their work, for example, in mathematics. It is important that this improvement in attitudes translates into gains in learning and improved levels of attainment.

Pupils' behaviour and movement around the school are orderly and they respond very well to clear boundaries at playtime. There have been no exclusions and attendance remains above the national average. Pupils uphold the school's values in the way that they respect each other. The charitable efforts that they engage in show their thoughtfulness for people in other parts of the world who are less fortunate than themselves.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is unrelenting in her pursuit of a shared vision for the school and is the driving force behind continuing change and steady improvement. She is also supporting other leaders to develop their roles. As a result, they make an increasing contribution to supporting the school's improvement. Leaders carry out a range of activities to check the quality of provision. From these, staff get regular feedback on what they need to improve and leaders devise relevant training opportunities based on an evaluation of teachers' needs. Observations of teaching and sampling of pupils' work focus too much on what pupils do rather than on what they are learning and the gains they have made. Leaders are not using all the information gathered, including that from records of pupils' attainment and progress, to provide an overview of teaching quality.

The school's systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress across the school are more robust. Regular opportunities for staff to discuss assessment and moderate their judgements with each other are helping to make assessment more accurate. The increasingly detailed information enables leaders to identify pupils in danger of falling behind and so needing more support and/or challenge. Programmes of support are being put in place quickly as a result of this information. The impact of such support on the progress of pupils will be checked at the next monitoring inspection. Support programmes for pupils who have special educational needs are having mixed results: some pupils are making huge strides while others are making minimal progress. Leaders have yet to evaluate the cause of such variability.

The external review of governance has identified some steps for improvement with which governors agree and which they are actively seeking to implement and develop. The pace of this development needs to increase. Individual governors are

now linked to areas of the school or aspects of the school's work but the programme of visits, discussed at the previous monitoring inspection, is not yet underway. Minutes of meetings show that governors are more actively challenging the school's leaders but governors admit this still needs further work. Following the previous inspection, governors have regularly sought updates on the outcomes of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. The development of the governing body's role has fallen on a small group that is seeking to encourage more governors to take an active role in helping the school to improve.

External support

Direct support from the local authority's link inspector has focused on strategic support for the headteacher. Plans for the focus to shift to more direct support for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in future are well founded. Support from external partners has been beneficial in improving the range and quality of activities provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage but there is more to do here to improve the quality of assessment. There are plans for governors to have further training.