

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



2 December 2015

Mr Tony Billings
Executive Headteacher
St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School
Grangeway
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 5YH

Dear Mr Billings

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School

Following my visit with Liam Trippier and John Leigh, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 17 and 18 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 appoint newly qualified teachers, in consultation with me, 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, Chair of the Governing Body and Director of Children's Services for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Julie Yarwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils' achievement across the school accelerates rapidly, particularly in English, mathematics, geography and history, at GCSE and in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use all the information they have on pupils' capability to plan activities that will challenge pupils to think hard, deepen their understanding, awaken their curiosity, and raise their expectations of what can be achieved
 - ensuring that teachers maximise the opportunities in lessons to check their pupils' understanding, making sure that pupils have captured the key ideas in order to progress their learning
 - making sure that when teachers mark pupils' work, they focus on those aspects that will bring about the greatest gains in pupils' understanding in order to accelerate their progress, and then making sure that pupils act on this advice.
- Increase the proportion of pupils, and in particular disadvantaged pupils, making expected progress and more than expected progress in English and mathematics at GCSE, so that both measures are at least in line with national figures.
- As a matter of urgency, improve the impact of leadership and management in improving the quality of teaching, and so raise standards of achievement by:
 - ensuring that the senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the school is doing, including the quality of teaching, is rigorous and robust and used to inform the priorities in the school development plan
 - ensuring governors use a range of sources of evidence on the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account
 - continuing to develop rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' progress across the school and in all subjects and using this information to target effective extra help for those pupils who are falling behind
 - using performance management to improve teachers' classroom practice and hold them rigorously to account for pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that improving the quality of teaching features as one of the key areas for improvement in the school development plan
 - ensuring that the information published on the school website meets statutory requirements.

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

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations to the appropriate authority responsible for the school.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with the executive headteacher and the head of school, senior and middle leaders, three groups of pupils, a group of three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. Telephone conversations were held with the school's challenge partner and with a representative of the Catholic Archdiocese. Inspectors scrutinised documents and observed lessons across the school and in a range of subject areas. Two of the lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at the work of pupils in lessons and in addition conducted a separate work scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work from Years 8 and 11. The work scrutiny was carried out jointly with the executive headteacher and the head of school.

Context

At the end of the last academic year, 16 teachers left the school and 20 teachers joined the school in September. A non-teaching leader who has the overview of standards of achievement has been appointed and has taken up post. The former heads of English, science and history have relinquished their posts of responsibility. A new head of English has joined the school and a colleague from within the existing staff has been promoted to lead the history department. The science department is currently being led by an acting head of department and the school is in the process of recruiting a permanent appointment to this post. A lead practitioner has been appointed in humanities to lead developments in teaching and learning in this curriculum area.

The school is in the process of appointing a headteacher to take up post in either April or September next year.

Outcomes for pupils

The school had predicted improvements at GCSE in 2015 but a legacy of underachievement and poor teaching over time, coupled with over-generous predictions, meant that the improvements did not come to fruition. The proportion of pupils attaining five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics declined in 2015, as did the rate of progress in both English and mathematics. The performance of pupils in geography at GCSE showed improvement. The performance of disadvantaged pupils at GCSE in 2015 remained low when compared with national figures.

At A level, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to B showed improvement and overall, results were close to targets. At AS level, the proportion gaining grades A* to B was in line with the target but outcomes at grades A* to C and A* to E fell short of targets.

Following the disappointing results, leaders in school have taken immediate and decisive action to ensure the validity of the assessment information that they gather. The information that is now captured and recorded by teachers for all year groups in school no longer records a predicted grade for future examination performance, but indicates only the current working grade for pupils. This is based on assessed pieces of work, and assessments are moderated externally. Teachers and leaders are able to compare the current working grade with pupils' target grades on their 'flight paths'. This new process is helping to improve confidence in the assessment information and is enabling better targeting of additional help.

Pupils in Year 11 are being provided with an enhanced focus on the importance of revision and preparation for tests. Pupils whose assessment grades fall below their personal target standards now receive additional guidance and re-sit their assessments after school. Pupils spoken to by an inspector commented that this process is helping them to improve as they have recognised the importance of revision and preparation for assessments.

The performance information for pupils currently in the school is showing improvement in English in particular, including for disadvantaged pupils. There has been some very recent improvement in mathematics but to a lesser extent than in English and leaders are aware that progress in this area needs to accelerate rapidly.

Progress seen in pupils' work and in lessons indicates that standards in a range of subjects are improving, but inspectors noted a need for greater challenge of the most-able pupils in order to enhance their progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

School leaders have continued to place a strong focus on developing the quality of teaching. There are weekly training sessions for teachers which focus on developing and embedding good practice. As a result of the training, the quality of teaching overall is improving but some inconsistencies remain.

The quality of the marking of pupils' work continues to show improvement. Marking is regular and in line with the school's policy but pupils do not always follow up on the comments made by their teachers. This means that maximum benefit is not yet gained from the marking and pupils' progress is not accelerated as a result. Inspectors noted some examples of teachers' comments being difficult to read which does not model best practice in handwriting or enable pupils to immediately understand what they have to do to improve.

The use of 'flight paths' which track pupils' progress against their target grades has become more embedded since the last monitoring visit. Teachers are using the assessment information more proactively to target underperformance, and inspectors saw evidence of the impact of additional work being tracked on the flight paths of some pupils. Pupils in the sixth form commented that they had noticed an increasing emphasis on progress and dialogue about this with their teachers.

Teachers are using a range of strategies to engage pupils more and were observed checking pupils' understanding to avoid misconceptions. In general, working relationships between teachers and pupils were seen to be strong and positive. There were, however, some examples seen when pupils did not listen well enough or talked when their teacher was explaining something, and this had a negative impact on their progress. Other adults present in lessons were observed to be supporting pupils' learning effectively.

Where pupils were asked to work in groups, inspectors noted that the groups were not always organised as effectively as they could be. This resulted in some pupils not participating and allowing others to do the work. Consequently, the progress of some pupils was limited.

Inspectors observed the use of some effective questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and challenge thinking. There is still work to be done to ensure that this is consistently the case and that questioning extends pupils' thinking beyond a superficial level. There is a need to ensure that the most-able pupils in particular are appropriately challenged in lessons.

The teaching in mathematics currently shows considerable inconsistency. There is more to be done in this curriculum area to share practice and ensure that learning is set in context, with sufficiently challenging activities for pupils. These developments are needed in order to engage and enthuse pupils and promote better progress in this subject.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils show generally positive attitudes towards their work and are polite to staff and visitors. They wear their uniform smartly and are punctual to their lessons. Pupils spoken to by inspectors gave a positive view of the behaviour of pupils in the school. A new behaviour policy has been introduced and school leaders reported that this is helping to improve the consistency of the behaviour processes in school.

Inspectors noted a few instances of low-level disruption in some lessons. This occurred predominantly where teaching was less effective and was demonstrated by a lack of focus and application to work and talking when the teacher was addressing the class.

School leaders set ambitious targets for attendance. The attendance of all groups of pupils is tracked carefully and the procedures for ensuring good attendance are robust. Attendance is currently broadly in line with national averages.

Behaviour and exclusion information is analysed in detail. The rate of fixed-term exclusions for 2014/15 was above national figures but has reduced in the first part of this academic year to a below-average rate.

School leaders work with a wide range of external services, including the police and social care services, in order to support the needs of vulnerable pupils. Swift actions are taken where concerns about pupils' well-being are raised. Clear records of actions taken are recorded.

Prevent training, which focuses on the prevention of extremism and radicalisation, has been completed by all staff. Evidence seen in tutor time during the inspection shows that this is effective in helping to promote tolerance and understanding; for example, pupils were encouraged to reflect on the recent events in Paris.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and senior leaders are continuing to drive improvements in the school. They show a determination, through their development planning and actions, to ensure that the improvements that they are making are sustainable.

The importance that leaders have placed on developing the quality of teaching is having a positive impact in most areas of the curriculum. From the beginning of the current academic year, leaders have introduced new structures in departments to support further developments. These structures include having a lead teacher for teaching and learning in each department and the use of specifically targeted support for disadvantaged pupils both in lessons and through mentoring. It is currently too early to assess the impact of these specific initiatives.

Senior leaders recognise that further work is needed to accelerate progress, particularly in mathematics. An external review of the subject area has very recently been completed and leaders plan to use the recommendations from this review to help secure improvements.

The newly appointed leader for English is bringing about positive changes in the department, which include new schemes of work and assessment and shared planning between teachers. Although at an early stage, there is evidence that this work is improving pupils' progress in English.

Middle leaders are becoming more involved in evaluating the work of their departments through the analysis of progress data, work scrutiny, lesson observations and gathering pupils' opinions about their subject area. They produce a departmental calendar of formal monitoring activities. There is more to be done to ensure that shorter, more regular monitoring of the typicality of pupils' learning takes place. In addition, further work is needed to support middle leaders in having conversations that hold staff to account where performance falls short of expectations. This work is planned to take place.

Senior leaders have put appropriate strategies in place to support the leadership development of middle leaders. Some of the strategies involve middle leaders working with colleagues from All Hallows Catholic College and participating in an externally accredited course to develop their skills in their roles.

Inspectors saw recent evidence of performance management processes being used to challenge teacher underperformance. There is scope for further sharpening of the language used in performance objectives to ensure that targets are precise.

Governors continue to be more actively involved in the strategic leadership of the school and offer their support and challenge through a range of mechanisms, including weekly meetings and a system of governors linked to subject areas. It is apparent that governors now take a more outward-looking approach and share ideas with fellow governors in other schools.

The members of the governing body who spoke to an inspector said that they had received specific training that had equipped them with the language needed for conversations about school performance. Governors receive assessment information to show how pupils are performing but they are not currently given an evaluation of the data prior to their meeting. This means that they are not as well prepared as they could be to ask probing questions about the data.

External support

The executive headteacher and his school continue to provide strong, extensive and effective support for the staff at St Chad's. This support is focusing on enabling senior leaders, and middle leaders who are new to their posts, to develop their skills in leadership, as well as providing an external view on the quality of teaching and learning in subject areas. The work involving the cross-moderation of pupils' work and assessment is providing a valuable external view for teachers in ensuring the accuracy of the assessment information.

School leaders are aware that this level of support will need to reduce but comment that they feel empowered by the support that they have received.