

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



23 June 2021

Stephen Belbin
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster
Aldrens Lane
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA1 2DU

Dear Mr Belbin

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster

Following my visit with John Tomlinson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) to your school on 25 and 26 May 2021, 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 that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Lancaster, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Cropper
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 May 2021

Context

The current headteacher is the third temporary associate headteacher to lead the school since the previous inspection. Governors have appointed a permanent headteacher to take up post from September 2021. At the time of the inspection, both the associate headteacher and the permanent headteacher were involved in leading the school. Since the previous inspection, a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), and a new leader for English, have also been appointed. There have been a number of changes to the governing body. A new chair of governors joined the governing body in September 2020. The school is due to join a multi-academy trust in September 2021.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous inspection, leaders have not taken the action needed to ensure that all pupils across the school receive an ambitious curriculum in all subjects. Leaders' plans to bring about the necessary improvements to the school are clearly set out and are fit for purpose. However, leaders do not use these plans effectively to improve the quality of education for pupils. Despite the impact of the pandemic, leaders and governors have not tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection at the pace required.

While pupils benefit from well-thought-out curriculum plans in some subjects, such as science and mathematics, there remain considerable weaknesses in curriculum plans in other subjects. For example, there are considerable deficiencies in important wider curriculum areas, such as art and design. In these subjects, curriculum leaders continue to provide ineffective guidance to teachers to ensure that pupils build up their knowledge as well as they should. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

As identified at the previous inspection, there remains considerable weaknesses in the reading curriculum for many pupils. This is because the leadership of reading is weak. While children in the early years benefit from an increasingly effective early reading curriculum, many other pupils across the school do not. Children in the early years know that sounds can be used to read and write words. Staff make sure that children in the Nursery Class and the Reception Year get the right support that they need to build up their reading knowledge. In stark contrast, leaders' and staff's expectations of pupils in key stage 1 are low. Pupils in key stage 1 are more likely to forget the sounds that they have been learning about. They struggle to work out what words say.

The poor-quality reading curriculum hampers pupils' ability to access other subjects. For example, leaders have not ensured that pupils in key stage 1 have the reading knowledge that they require to be ready for the challenges of the key stage 2 curriculum. Leaders have not ensured that staff use a consistent approach to the teaching of reading. Pupils do not progress across the reading curriculum as they should in key stage 1.

While many pupils have fallen behind in their reading, staff have begun to take action to identify the learning that pupils have missed or forgotten in some other subjects, as a result of the pandemic. Teachers are focusing on writing and mathematics to help pupils to catch up. This strategy is reaping some rewards in mathematics. In mathematics, teachers know what learning pupils need to revisit to enable them to catch up.

Leaders have recently reviewed and updated systems to improve pupils' behaviour across the school. However, these systems are not embedded. Inspectors found that since the previous inspection, some pupils' behaviour has worsened. In key stage 1, teachers allow poor behaviour to disturb learning. Some pupils in lower key stage 2 are easily distracted and start to chat when they should be working. Conversely, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are more focused during lessons.

Outside of lessons, some pupils display unacceptable boisterous behaviour as they move around the school. Added to this, while pupils said that most types of bullying are dealt with swiftly by staff, several pupils said that homophobic name-calling was likely to happen at the school. They told inspectors that this is accepted.

While leaders and governors do not promote equality and diversity effectively, they have improved how well some pupils attend school. For example, leaders have introduced the 'walking-bus' scheme. Leaders have also focused on ensuring that teachers are increasingly successful in helping pupils with SEND to attend school. The new SENCo is helping teachers to provide increasingly effective support so that pupils with SEND can access learning.

Governors have not kept a close eye on the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the school. They have not ensured that school improvement plans are actioned in a timely manner. For example, governors have not ensured that the reading curriculum is appropriately delivered right across the school. The governing body does not fulfil its statutory duty by having a strong strategic oversight of the school. Most worryingly, some governors are unaware of how they ensure that all members of the school community are not discriminated against, as required by the Equality Act 2010.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that the governing body carries out its statutory responsibilities, especially in relation to the Equality Act 2010.

Additional support

Senior leaders have accessed the support available during the pandemic. Leaders and governors have worked closely with the local authority and the Diocese of Lancaster to develop some elements of the curriculum. Leaders and governors require further support to improve the curriculum, including the reading curriculum. Governors do not have the support that they require to carry out their statutory responsibilities, including under the Equality Act 2010.

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with: senior and middle leaders; pupils; staff; parents; representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors; and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection.

Inspectors considered the documentation that leaders provided. Inspectors scrutinised curriculum plans. They reviewed records of the meetings of the governing body. They also looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors considered the 15 responses recorded on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.