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Basia McLaughlin
Headteacher
St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School
Fossedale Avenue
Whitchurch
Bristol
BS14 9LS

Dear Mrs McLaughlin

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 24 January, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, four leaders of learning, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the inspector also looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work. The inspector also accompanied the headteacher on a walk around the school visiting six classrooms.

Context

One member of the senior leadership team has left the school since the previous inspection. Three middle leaders have recently been promoted to become associate members of the senior leadership team. The governing body has advanced plans for the school to become an academy by the start of the next academic year.

Main findings

Leaders have reacted positively and quickly to the previous inspection report. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the addition of three new associate members. Their brief is to support the drive to quickly address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. There is a positive climate within the school and all senior and middle leaders spoken to were committed to working towards the school being judged good as quickly as possible.

The headteacher and other senior leaders have been pro-active in establishing a firm foundation to improve the quality of teaching. Good systems are in place to monitor teaching and appropriate levels of challenge and support are in place to improve teachers' practice. Greater emphasis is being placed on planning work that is matched to students with different abilities and the effective management of behaviour. Good practice is being shared within the school and links are beginning to be established with other schools to improve practice. Tracking data provided by the school indicates that improving practice is beginning to have a positive impact on students' achievement, particularly in mathematics.

Systems to hold middle leaders to account for students' progress have been reviewed and developed since the previous inspection. An audit of middle leaders' skills has been undertaken and as a result, each middle leader has an agreed action plan to improve their performance. Systems to share good practice between middle leaders in the school have been established and links with middle leaders in other schools is being developed.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school's work. They have high expectations and ask suitably challenging questions to both middle and senior leaders. The previous plan for improvement has been reviewed and a new post Ofsted action plan has been developed. The plan addresses all aspects that were judged to require improvement and actions are appropriate and well-targeted. However, the success criteria are not always sufficiently measurable and linked to specific time scales so that the governing body can systematically evaluate the impact of the school's work and ensure that it is making rapid progress to becoming a good school.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- Strengthen the school's post Ofsted action plan by including more measurable success criteria against which the impact of actions can be more readily evaluated. It should be clear when these success criteria are expected to be achieved so that the governing body can more easily monitor the progress of the school to becoming good.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. I recommend that a further monitoring inspection is carried out at the start of the next academic year to assess how well placed the school is to undergo its next inspection.

External support

Leaders have been proactive in seeking support from external partners and this is beginning to make a positive contribution to the school's improvement. The local authority has provided some effective support which is assisting school improvement. For example, helpful support has been provided for the school's leadership and for teaching in modern foreign languages.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bristol.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector