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14 February 2013

Janice Babb
Executive Headteacher
St James the Great Roman Catholic Primary School
Peckham Road
London
SE15 5LP

Dear Ms Babb

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St James the Great Roman Catholic Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 February 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to members of the governing body, the local authority representative and the pupils for their time.

Since the last inspection the headteacher has retired. The governors have recruited an experienced executive headteacher, from another school within the diocese and local authority, to lead the school until a substantive appointment is made. A new governor has been appointed by the local authority and taken responsibility for parental liaison.

As a result of the inspection on 19 June 2012, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the last inspection rates of pupils' progress have improved in reading, writing and mathematics. The lack of accurate assessment information at the start of the year made it difficult for school leaders to judge the progress that was being made by pupils. This has been tackled by the judicious use of external moderation using local authority consultants. Leaders now have a greater understanding of pupils' progress using a range of different measures. These show that while progress rates are good in some year groups in reading, writing and mathematics they are not consistent across the school. Leaders and governors now have far better information about where progress is slower than expected and are planning for further interventions to boost achievement and accelerate progress.

The capacity and impact of leaders and managers have been significantly improved by the executive headteacher since she started in October. She has provided a renewed focus on teaching and learning and has provided the impetus for necessary changes. Pupils have noticed improvements in marking and the behaviour of their peers as a result of these changes. Middle leaders are now given dedicated time to undertake their roles and, with the support of local authority consultants, are beginning to develop their understanding and capability to undertake them. The school improvement plan accurately identifies the areas for improvement required and includes lines of accountability and realistic timescales. Success criteria are based on measures of expected pupil progress and help leaders monitor how much progress is being made and how quickly. The performance of staff has been comprehensively reviewed and a regular programme of observations and monitoring implemented. As a result, teachers and support staff are clearer about the quality of teaching that is expected and are given support and training in order to meet the targets they are set. As current systems have only been implemented since October their impact is yet to be fully realised in all teaching. School records and inspection evidence show that the proportion of teaching that is good or better has improved but that there is still a minority that requires improvement or is inadequate.

Teachers are starting to be held to account for the progress their pupils are making. They are required to use progress information to measure how well their pupils are performing over time. Teachers now have good information to support them in planning lessons that more closely match the needs of individual pupils. However, their ability to do so is variable. Some teachers consistently teach lessons that challenge the full ability range; for example, in a Year 6 lesson about King Kong the teacher skilfully challenged all pupils through her questioning. She carefully refocused and reframed questions to extend pupils' understanding and ability to ask open and closed questions. Pupils then enjoyed asking their own high-quality questions to classmates playing the role of characters in the book. However, in less successful lessons teaching still suffers from being too teacher-led, with pupils of all abilities undertaking similar tasks. This fails to develop independence and challenge for the more able learners and slows their progress.

Improving writing skills and ensuring that there are opportunities for pupils to practise these skills in other subjects as well as English has been a high priority for all staff. Training to improve the quality of phonics teaching has been undertaken by staff and improved their confidence and competence. The regular support of a local authority literacy consultant has helped facilitate adaptations to the curriculum to improve the quality and quantity of pupils' writing. Pupils have noticed that they have more opportunities to write for longer periods of time and use fewer worksheets. They are now given time in lessons to assess the quality of their own and others' work and respond to teachers' comments. Teacher assessments, evidence within books and displays of work show that this is having a positive impact on the quality of writing across the school.

Staff have responded to the higher expectations demanded of them in different ways. While some have appreciated the higher expectation levels and increasing support and encouragement, others have found the need for rapid change challenging, particularly in the early part of this academic year. The headteacher and governors are aware of the concerns raised by staff and are seeking solutions to them. They are not deterred from continuing to implement the actions that are needed if the school is to be successful.

Governors are well informed by the comprehensive reports and feedback they now receive from the executive headteacher. They feel more able to ask challenging questions and are more confident that these will be answered in the detail they need. Meetings are more frequent and minutes show that governors have a good understanding of the way teaching is monitored and how staff are performing. They can now effectively monitor pupils' progress and start to judge the effectiveness of interventions from the detailed information provided to them. The recruitment of a permanent headteacher is a high priority and governors are determined that the improvements achieved so far are followed up and sustained by any new appointment. They are supportive of the changes made by the executive headteacher and admire the new sense of direction and urgency that she has brought to the school.

The local authority statement of action meets requirements and contains appropriate strategies for supporting the school to improve. The school's development plan has evolved from the statement of action through discussion between the headteacher, governors and the local authority. The local authority has provided extensive high-quality support to enable the school to make the necessary improvements identified at the previous inspection. This has taken the form of further training and support for staff to improve teaching as well as support for the school's leaders and governors to tackle the changes that have had to be made. Leaders, including governors, are very appreciative of this and continue to draw on the advice of the local authority while building a clear vision for the future.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2012

Strengthen the capacity and impact of leaders and managers by:

- implementing a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluating teaching
- ensuring that the governing body receives accurate information about the quality of teaching and how well groups of pupils are making progress so that it can hold the school robustly to account
- ensuring that school improvement plans have measurable success criteria, based on pupils' achievement, to enable the school to evaluate the progress it is making towards achieving its aims
- evaluating intervention strategies frequently to ensure they are effective in accelerating pupils' progress.

Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:

- ensuring teachers use assessment information well to always match work to the needs of individual pupils, especially those who are more able
- ensuring that the marking of pupils' work is consistently of good quality.

Improve pupils' progress in writing by:

- taking swift action to ensure that staff are effectively trained in teaching phonics
- reducing the number of worksheets that pupils use and providing pupils with sufficient opportunities to practise their writing skills in other subjects as well as in English.

Odd positioning of sub-bullet symbols on this page