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Jane Price
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Southam
Daventry Road
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CV47 1PS

Dear Mrs Price

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Southam

Following my visit to your school on the 5 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your deputy head, the leaders for English and mathematics and the Vice Chair of the Governing Body. I also met with a representative of the local authority and your Local Leader in Education. I evaluated the school improvement and action plans and I scrutinised the school's records of pupils' progress, minutes of governing body meetings and the outcomes of monitoring activities. I visited five lessons to observe the quality of teaching.

Context

At the time of the inspection in January 2013, you were the acting headteacher. You have subsequently been appointed as the permanent headteacher.

Main findings

As a result of the improvements you are implementing, pupils are making better progress. These improvements are largely because teachers are planning lessons more carefully to meet the needs of different ability pupils. In Years 2 and 6 attainment is rising and it is at the national average. Pupils' reading is improving strongly because a much more rigorous approach is being taken to the teaching of letters and sounds. Pupils are reading more texts at a level appropriate to their abilities because a more effective reading scheme is being implemented. Although further improvement is needed, children in the Foundation Stage are making better progress because teachers are providing them with more guidance. More effective use is being made of teaching assistants because better use is being made of the skills they possess.

Better marking and pupils' involvement in peer and self-assessment is enabling them to take responsibility for improving their work, particularly at Key Stage 2. Pupils are enjoying the increased opportunities they have to learn about mathematics in a range of interesting contexts such as through the recent enterprise day. However, opportunities are missed to use different subjects to stimulate pupils' interest and reinforce the skills they are developing in English and mathematics.

You and other leaders in the school have an astute awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. Leaders have correctly identified the shortcomings in teaching that reduce the progress pupils make in some lessons; for instance the lack of effective reviews of learning that clearly highlight how pupils of different abilities can excel. The governing body has taken steps to increase the stability in staffing and strengthen the accountability of staff. The Chair of Governors has a very good awareness of the progress pupils are making in each year group. You have ensured that the school has a suitable range of improvement plans that address all the issues identified at the recent inspection. You acknowledge that a relative weakness is the omission of key targets that governors can use to check regularly the progress being made in improving the school.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- develop more precise targets that can be used by the governing body to regularly hold senior leaders to account for the progress made by all groups of pupils.
- further enhance the curriculum to make learning more enjoyable and to reinforce the skill pupils are learning in English and mathematics.
- further improve the assessment for learning during lessons; for instance through allowing pupils to evaluate each other's work regularly.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing you with support that has contributed to the improvements in reading and in the Foundation Stage. Staff are highly appreciative of the opportunities they have to observe good practice organised through your Local Leader of Education. Further support should provide staff with opportunities to undertake more planning collaboratively with colleagues that are effective practitioners.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Warwickshire and the Diocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector