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11 June 2013

Mrs Claire Cooke
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Swithin's Catholic Primary School
Parkstile Lane
Liverpool
Merseyside
L11 0BQ

Dear Mrs Cooke

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady and St Swithin's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool

Following my visit to your school on 10 June 2013, 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 prior to my visit to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection. Please pass on my thanks to your deputy headteacher, who was very helpful to me during the visit.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a representative from the Archdiocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. It was not possible to evaluate the post-Ofsted action plan, as it was not made available to me during the visit. During my time at the school, I looked at pupils' work, scrutinised documentation relating to actions taken to improve the school since the Ofsted inspection, examined information on pupil progress, visited a number of classrooms and talked to some pupils.

Context

There have been no changes in context since the previous inspection.

Main findings

There is no evidence to suggest that all members of the school community have got the message that this school needs to improve quickly. School leaders have so far not been successful in confronting weaknesses identified at the inspection; nor have they managed to inspire everybody to work together and turn round a long legacy of underachievement.

School leaders have not yet formulated or shared with staff a clear plan to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. In addition, the plan to improve mathematics that was presented to me during my visit had been drawn up prior to the inspection and had not yet been revised, despite the fact that progress in mathematics was identified as an area for improvement. Although many discussions have taken place regarding the steps that need to be taken, these have amounted to a series of well-intentioned aspirations. As a result, there is little concrete evidence to show that the school has moved forward, apart from the fact that attendance has improved slightly since the inspection.

This school is being held back by a culture of a lack of accountability that has become embedded over many years. A succession of headteachers has met with much resistance to change and inadequate teaching has not been tackled effectively. Sometimes teachers have not responded positively to leaders' direction. This is still standing in the way of school leaders steering the school on the correct course in order that it becomes a good school quickly.

The governing body has not challenged the school sufficiently therefore there has been a lack of urgency in responding to the findings of the inspection. Governors have not been insistent enough on making sure the school community is ambitious for improvement. Procedures for performance management are not having the impact they should be having on improving the overall quality of teaching because implementation has been, and remains, too slow.

Although school leaders are aware that some teaching is of poor quality, indeed inadequate teaching was observed during the inspection, there is still no formal programme in place to make sure that such underperformance is tackled. No lesson observations have taken place since the previous inspection. Inspectors found that teaching and learning are good in many lessons, but the school is still not using this expertise effectively enough to improve the overall quality of teaching. Middle leaders have received additional training to equip them with the skills required so that they can drive up the quality of teaching in their area of responsibility. However, the impact of this training in driving improvement is not yet in evidence. For example, during my visit I saw examples of very poor marking, despite this being highlighted at the inspection as an area for improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- draw up a sharply focused and appropriate plan to make sure that this school becomes a good school quickly, so that all pupils can achieve well and get the very best out of their time at Our Lady and Saint Swithin's
- establish a clear vision for improvement, making sure all members of the school community are on board and share the ambition to turn the school around
- instigate formal proceedings to rout out inadequate teaching
- set up effective procedures to share existing good practice in order to improve the overall quality of teaching
- strengthen the governing body to provide greater challenge to the school
- consider restructuring staffing so that responsibility posts are clearly linked to school improvement
- ensure that performance management procedures become embedded and that teachers are unequivocally held to account for the progress of pupils in their classes
- ensure that middle leaders are held to account for performance in their areas of responsibility.

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

Support from the local authority has been extensive and challenging; however, again, like past and present leaders of the school, local authority representatives have encountered many obstacles standing in the way of improvement. The local authority and the Archdiocese had intended to rebuild the school on a new site, with the potential for, in the view of the local authority, 'a fresh start'. These plans met with opposition from parents and carers and are now on hold.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.