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18 June 2013

Mrs Sandra Slack
Headteacher
St John Bosco RC Primary School
Hall Moss Road
Blackley
Manchester
M9 7AT

Dear Mrs Slack

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Bosco RC Primary School, Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I had meetings with you and the deputy headteacher and with the teacher with responsibility for mathematics. I also met with the Chair of Governors and the Chair of the Finance Committee, a representative from the local authority and a group of Year 6 children. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford. You accompanied me on a tour of the school when I observed children engaged on a number of learning activities related to mathematics. I looked at a range of documentation including the school development plan and the school's most recent quality assurance report from the local authority. I also scrutinised children's work in a sample of their books.

Context

You have recently been appointed by the governing body to cover for the temporary absence of the headteacher in order to strengthen leadership and management of the school. A temporary teacher has been appointed to cover the timetable of the deputy headteacher as she takes on a wider leadership role. A member of the permanent staff has been given an additional responsibility for the provision of children with special educational needs and disabilities, in the temporary absence of the current post holder.

Main findings

The governors, staff and colleagues from the local authority accept the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection and agree that the areas for improvement are the correct ones for the school.

Due to the recent, unavoidable, absence of the permanent headteacher the governors took effective action to ensure that the senior leadership was not going to be disadvantaged during her time away from the school and appointed you. You bring with you a wealth of experience intended to strengthen leadership and management and help guide the school on its journey of improvement.

Since the inspection the local authority has brokered a successful link for St John Bosco with a local primary school judged outstanding at its most recent inspection. This has enabled St John Bosco staff to observe good practice and learn from their colleagues about more effective ways of teaching mathematics. In addition the mathematics coordinator has formed an effective working relationship with his counterpart from the link school. This is beginning to strengthen leadership and management of the subject and provide a clear direction for further improvement.

You and your colleagues have recently introduced a new tracking system. This enables teachers to monitor the progress that pupils are making across the school. It also helps governors to hold teachers to account for the standards achieved by the children they teach. The current data shows that in mathematics the progress being made by pupils in Year 6 is broadly in line with the national figure. This is an improvement on the progress made by Year 6 pupils last year, where it was below average. You and your colleagues have confidence in the assessment activities used by teachers to assess pupils' progress. However, this progress data has yet to be independently validated to confirm that teachers have an accurate understanding of National Curriculum levels in mathematics and can apply them reliably.

Since the inspection the school's marking policy has been reviewed and a new one recently introduced. The best quality marking gives pupils information about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. As a result pupils are able to learn from their mistakes. However, this policy is not implemented consistently well by all teachers.

The school development plan has an indisputable focus on achievement. The plan has also been adjusted in the light of the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection to address each of the areas for improvement identified in the report. However, it is not always clear who has responsibility for each of the actions in the plan. Similarly it does not indicate who is responsible for checking that actions have been taken and how the effectiveness of those actions, in terms of their impact on pupils' outcomes, will be assessed.

Governors are behind the staff in their drive to improve the school. They are aware that now they have filled the temporary vacancies in the leadership team, the pace of change needs to be accelerated to ensure that the targets in the school development plan are achieved.

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

- refine the school development plan so that it is clear who is responsible for each of the actions to improve the school and clarify who is responsible for checking that the actions being taken are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement
- make sure that all teachers implement the new marking policy so that pupils know what they have done well and what they need to do to make their work even better.

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 effective support to leaders and managers to help them deliver the targets in the school development plan. Soon after the previous inspection they brokered the link with a local primary school to enable the sharing of good practice in mathematics teaching and strengthen the leadership and management of the subject. The local authority is also assisting governors in determining, accurately, how well the school is doing through visits from a quality assurance professional.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Manchester and the Director of Education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector