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25 May 2013

Gillian Howell
Headteacher
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Littlehampton
Highdown Drive
Littlehampton
BN17 6HL

Dear Mrs Howell

Monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to a school requiring improvement

Following my visit to your school on 24 May 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.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013.

Evidence

I discussed the school's progress since the section 5 inspection with you, with your Chair of Governors and another governor, and with teachers. I met a group of pupils drawn from each year in Key Stage 2. I reviewed the school's post-inspection action plan and other relevant documentation, including an up-to-date analysis of pupils' attainment and progress and records of your observations of teaching and learning. With you and the deputy headteacher, I visited each class, talked briefly to pupils and to the class teacher and looked at the range of work and information displayed in classrooms and along the corridors.

Context

Since the last inspection, construction work on two new classrooms has advanced and is now having a direct but well-managed impact on the school's use of space and resources. The work is scheduled for completion before the new school year. The Year 6 class teacher is on long-term absence, so the class is being taught by a

supply teacher. In April, a member of the teaching staff was given responsibility for redesigning the curriculum, beginning with Key Stage 1.

Main findings

The school's action plan shows that the school has responded positively to the judgements and recommendations presented in January's inspection report. Its focus is on establishing greater consistency, as recommended, in all aspects of teaching and learning. Great weight is placed on the expected impact of new policies and standardised forms for planning, lesson observations, marking and assessment but it is too soon to judge how well these will work in practice. The school's broad objectives are, rightly, ambitious – to have all teaching good or better before the next inspection – but the plan itself lacks precision and clarity in key areas. 'Actions to be taken', for example, are not consistently practical and specific enough for step-by-step progress to be measured against realistic targets. The plan does not make it clear who is to be responsible for making each action happen, by when, and who will monitor its impact. More is recorded in the plan as having already been achieved than evidence indicates. The Chair of Governors has a sharp appreciation of what now needs to be done, as a priority, to improve teaching and learning.

In response to staffing issues, you have personally picked up the weight of most initiatives. You have, for example, undertaken most lesson observations, mentored the newly qualified teachers, taken on the role of English and literacy leader, and shared lesson-planning and assessment with a teacher experiencing difficulties. This is not sustainable, although your concern for the well-being of your staff contributes significantly to their confidence and commitment. Lesson-observation records indicate that opportunities are missed to drive up teaching standards through rigorous analysis of how teaching and learning can be improved. Opportunities for senior and middle leaders to make a practical and sustained contribution are limited but there are examples of good practice; weekly plans are monitored especially well in mathematics and more opportunities have been created for pupils to develop problem-solving skills. Pupils value assessment - 'You really learn from it!' - and they take their personal targets very seriously.

Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- make the action plan more precise and practical, with clear targets, a challenging timescale and rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress
- ensure all senior and middle leaders take responsibility for driving improvement in all areas of the school.

I will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority's School Improvement Advisor contributed to the action plan and monitors the school's progress. The authority has provided consultancy support in the Reception class to help the school promote children's development as independent learners through a better balance between activities directed by the teacher and those chosen by the children. It has also provided consultancy support for the governors.

Governors, the headteacher and subject leaders benefit from sharing experiences and learning from others' good practice within a local group of schools and the diocesan deanery group.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector