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16 July 2013

Mr Vincent Murray
Headteacher
St Michael and St John's Roman Catholic Primary School, Clitheroe
Lowergate
Clitheroe
Lancashire
BB7 1AG

Dear Mr Murray

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael and St John's Roman Catholic Primary School, Clitheroe, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 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 . It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your senior management team, two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I made brief visits to some classes and spoke to pupils who were enjoying their 'French day'. I evaluated the school's action plan and considered leaders' monitoring records and details of pupils' progress.

Context

You are leaving the school at the end of the summer term after eighteen years' service, to take up headship of a federation of schools. An associate headteacher will lead St Michael and St John's school during the autumn term. Governors are in the process of appointing a permanent headteacher. Staffing is otherwise unchanged since the recent section 5 inspection. Arrangements are in place for the imminent appointment of two new teaching assistants to support the school's drive to further accelerate pupils' progress. An assistant headteacher appointment is being made to build leadership capacity.

Main findings

You have drawn up a clear and comprehensive action plan that fully addresses the areas for improvement identified at the school's recent inspection. Teachers have contributed their ideas and been fully involved in agreeing the plan. The evaluation of the impact of key actions is fully scheduled and recorded.

Your data, based on moderated teachers' assessments of pupils' work, indicates that most pupils in school are making at least expected progress in English and mathematics although there are some variations across classes. The proportion of pupils exceeding expected progress is rising. The school's performance in the recent end of Key Stage 2 tests indicates strong achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school was disappointed by the recent inspection outcome, but accepts the areas for improvement identified by inspectors, that reflect those highlighted by you and your senior management team through your own self-evaluation. Staff are working with energy, urgency and enthusiasm to ensure that practice is strengthened, particularly in the teaching of mathematics.

You have led your staff in a review of the school's teaching and learning policy and produced a useful, simplified set of criteria for effective teaching. This is used as the basis for leaders' observations of classroom practice. All teachers have been observed by you or your deputy headteacher since the inspection and have received helpful, detailed evaluative feedback.

Teachers are improving their lesson planning to indicate the levels that different groups of children are working at, in order to ensure that lessons fully meet individuals' needs. You monitor teachers' planning regularly and provide feedback on your findings. Literacy and numeracy leaders review teachers' planning alongside pupils' work to check that the intentions set out in plans result in good progress being made by pupils. All teachers have received training on how to ensure that able, gifted and talented pupils are challenged and supported.

The school's marking policy has been revamped to clarify expectations of high quality feedback to pupils. Your monitoring indicates that the quality of teachers' marking is rising. You are providing further support to those teachers whose work requires improvement.

A link has been established with a school judged to be outstanding at its most recent inspection to enable the sharing of good practice in teaching and leadership.

Prior to the recent section 5 inspection, staff in Key Stage 1 received additional training in phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Your observations indicate that the teaching of phonics has improved. The results of the Year 1 phonics screening indicate considerable improvement in achievement in 2013 compared with that in 2012.

Your focus on improving mathematics is supported by a detailed plan that includes the development of opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills in different subjects, as well as ways of making mathematics lessons enjoyable and challenging. The mathematics leader has provided staff with helpful guidance on developing pupils' ability to use and apply their skills in 'real life' situations.

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:

- involve pupils in monitoring the impact of developments in teaching
- ensure that observations of practice in the partner Lancashire primary school are well-focused so that learning from them is maximised

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 provides the school with appropriate support that is well-targeted to meet individual teachers' needs, secure stable leadership for the future and promote whole school improvement.

The school adviser has given you effective support to draw up your rigorous action plan and has provided training for staff on meeting the needs of able, gifted and talented pupils. She has arranged for the associate headteacher to lead the school in the autumn term and is working with the governors and Salford Diocese to recruit a permanent headteacher. She has established a link with another Lancashire primary school to enable the sharing of good practice.

A local authority teaching and learning consultant is providing bespoke support for two teachers as well as leading whole staff training. The impact of previous support from the literacy consultant is now evident in improved practice in the teaching of phonics.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector