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Mrs E Leaman
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Northwood Road
Whitstable
CT5 2EY

Dear Mrs Leaman

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

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

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the progress director. Meetings were also held with a group of governors and a representative from the local authority. I evaluated the school improvement plan and a range of documentation including most recent governing body minutes, the school self-evaluation form and data relating to pupils' attainment and progress. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to all classes.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the leadership structure has been reviewed and new roles and responsibilities have recently been introduced. The senior leadership team now comprises a headteacher, a deputy headteacher and a progress director.

Main findings

School leaders and governors, ably supported by the local authority have made an impressive response to the findings of the section 5 inspection of May 2013. As a result of pre-existing accurate self-evaluation, precise awareness of what needed to improve and swift action taken, the end of Key Stage 2 results in 2013 showed strong improvement on the previous year.

The senior leadership team is an evident force for change combining energy, ambition and rigorous planning, scrutiny and evaluation. You have given careful consideration to the pairings of teachers in each year group in order that skill and support are well distributed. Effective monitoring of the quality of teaching is routine. Feedback is precise and professional development tailored to individuals' needs. Consequently, the quality of teaching overall is continuing to strengthen. There is a strong sense of staff team and morale appears high. Everyone is aware of the need to continue build on recent success and all staff have targets relating directly to pupils' progress. Information about pupils' progress and attainment is frequently reviewed to ensure all pupils' are making appropriate gains in their learning and to plan additional support whenever there is a risk that this is not the case.

The school improvement plan and the governing body action plan, dovetail exactly. Plans provide clear targets for each of the specified areas for improvement, a range of actions to achieve those goals, named people leading the actions and ambitious timeframes in which to succeed. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress towards targets are rigorous and systematic.

Changes to the organisation of the governing body, the pro-active recruitment of new members as well as support and training from the local authority has resulted in significantly strengthened governance. Governors understand their role in school improvement and bring a wealth of relevant expertise from other professions. The governors' monthly timetable gives a rapid overview of the extent of the involvement and influence of the governing body in school life.

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 adviser knows the school well and articulates confidence in the revised leadership and governance arrangements. High quality support, including a review of governance, professional development opportunities for teachers such as the 'Every Lesson Counts' programme as well formal progress review meetings are making strong contribution to the significant improvements identified during this monitoring visit.

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

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector