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8 November 2013

Mrs Emlin Bunn
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
The Broadway
Barking
IG11 7AR

Dear Mrs Bunn

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

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- provide staff with clear expectations about what they need to do in order to improve their teaching and move the school to good
- check that staff are following agreed practices and monitor the impact of actions more rigorously
- forge links with good and better schools to ensure that staff can see good practice
- implement the actions set out in the local authority's recent review.

Evidence

The visit focused on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' attainment, learning and progress. I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the school's link adviser and the Director of Children's Services for Barking and Dagenham. You accompanied me to five of the six parts of lessons I observed and we briefly visited four more classes to look at pupils' work. We discussed the information you have on pupils' attainment and progress and the outcomes of the local authority's recent review of teaching and learning. I held a feedback meeting at the end of the visit, which the large majority of governors attended.

Context

There have been considerable changes in staffing since the inspection almost a year ago; only the nursery teacher remains in post. Seven teachers joined the school in September, two of whom have taken up leadership roles and three of whom are new to teaching.

Main findings

Notwithstanding the turnover of staff, the pace of improvement is too slow. Unless the rate of change increases quickly, the school is unlikely to be judged good at the next inspection. Importantly, the quality of teaching is not reaching a good level quickly enough; currently some teaching is inadequate. This means that pupils' learning and progress is not strong enough to help them catch up to reach the levels expected for their age. Your own records of pupils' attainment and progress show that pupils in some year groups have much ground to make up. Notably, the current Year 6 did not make enough progress last year and will need to cover a lot of ground to meet the targets you have set for them by the end of the year.

Results in the national assessments and tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 were lower than you expected. These results did not meet the school's targets and were lower than the figures for 2012. They show that differences in the attainment of different groups of pupils, mentioned in the inspection a year ago, remain. In both key stages not enough pupils reached the higher levels of attainment (Level 3 and Level 5 respectively). Pupils' attainment in mathematics in Year 6 was significantly lower than the national figure. Pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding did not make as much progress as their peers in mathematics or reading. On average, they left Year 6 with attainment in mathematics about a year behind their peers. The outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage were broadly similar to the national picture and it is important that their experience in Year 1 builds on that start.

The quality of teaching we observed together was too variable. Although some good teaching was seen, aspects require improvement and there are some inadequacies that need to be tackled urgently. In the main, the strengths and weaknesses align with those reported to you following the local authority's review of the teaching in mathematics. In addition, we noted weaknesses in aspects of the teaching of phonics and reading. The pace of work in pupils' books and the quality of teachers' marking is also variable in quality. Marking does not always tell pupils how to improve their work. Given that marking was a key area that required improvement at the time of the inspection, such variability is symptomatic of the slow pace of change and a lack of clear expectations from senior leaders. We both saw some examples of pupils' work that had not been marked at all; this is simply unacceptable.

There is also work to be done to improve the quality of the observations and records of children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A positive feature is that parents and carers are encouraged to share what they know about their child as they join the school. However, so far, the staff make limited observations of children's learning on which to base an assessment of their needs as they start in nursery or reception. The records of observations on children who have transferred from your nursery are uneven across the seven areas of learning with limited evidence of children's progress towards some early learning goals.

The expectations set of staff by the school's leaders are not clear enough but, more importantly, you are not checking the quality of provision rigorously enough to hold the staff to account. For example, you have not taken robust action to follow up on two areas of weaker practice – the quality of guided reading sessions and the quality of assessment records in the Early Years Foundation Stage – that I identified during my short visit in the summer term. Consequently, the same weaknesses were evident at this visit. Although other actions to improve teaching are generally appropriate, they need to be followed up with more urgency to check that they are having the desired effect. You and the deputy headteacher had already identified some weaknesses in the quality of teaching before the local authority's review. Since the review, the deputy headteacher has worked quickly to put in place support plans for individual teachers to tackle the weaknesses in their practice. It is crucial that expectations of the quality of teaching are raised.

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 school has had some support from local authority consultants but the impact of such support, and of visits to see good practice at other schools, is not shown consistently in the quality of teaching. The monthly meetings of the monitoring

board chaired by the school's link adviser continue to challenge the school's leaders and governors about the quality of provision and the pace of change but, again, without effecting significant improvement. The report of the local authority's thorough review of the quality of teaching and learning sets out clear actions for the school's leaders to take.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector