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Mr Andrew Poskitt
Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
Springfield Road
Wigan
Lancashire
WN6 7RH

Dear Mr Poskitt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- match the findings from lesson observations more closely with information in pupils' books and school data to make sure you have an accurate view of teaching over time
- ensure all teachers respond to whole-school and individual targets so that weaknesses in teaching are eradicated more quickly
- review how you evaluate the findings on pupils' progress to ensure you have a reliable view of pupils' achievement across the school and teaching over time
- develop your analysis of data to take greater account of the progress pupils make from their different starting points so you can prevent any group from lagging behind
- revisit the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders and equip these leaders with the necessary skills and time so they make a greater contribution to improving teaching and pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself and the deputy headteacher. I also met with three members of the governing body, a local authority officer and a small group of pupils. We observed five lessons led by five teachers. We also visited classrooms to observe the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). School data, including the unvalidated 2013 Key Stage 2 results, were evaluated.

Context

Since the October inspection, a new Chair and vice-Chair of Governors have been elected. Two new foundation governors have been appointed to the governing body. Two teachers have returned to school following an extended period of absence. Two classes are currently being taught by temporary teachers to cover long and short-term teacher absence.

Main findings

Teaching is not improving quickly enough. Although there are pockets of very effective teaching, this is not reflected in all classrooms. Teaching is not good enough on a day-to-day basis to make a real difference to pupils' achievement. The 2013 unvalidated results confirm teaching over time is not helping pupils make stronger gains in their learning. As a result, Year 6 pupils did not make the same progress as all pupils nationally by the time they left the school. Your own information on pupils' progress shows teaching is too varied. Pupils generally make better progress in reading; your work on the school library is proving successful in encouraging pupils' to read for pleasure. However, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is no better than expected. Furthermore, the achievement gap between pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding and their peers is not closing quickly enough. This raises serious concerns about the school's capacity to become good before its next inspection.

Improving teaching has been a key priority. Nonetheless, the strategies you have put in place have not all been fruitful. You check the quality of teaching frequently but your view of teaching day-in and day-out across the school is too generous. This is because you do not closely match the findings from your lesson observation to the work in pupils' books and your own data. You are not relentless enough in making sure teachers act on individual and whole-school advice to ensure weaknesses are eradicated. Your evaluation of pupils' progress is sometimes too positive which gives an unreliable view of pupils' achievement across the school.

You have made sure all of the necessary systems to check on the school's progress are in place. Your information on pupils' achievement across the school is thorough and you are holding all teachers to account for the progress pupils make in each class. However, you are not digging deeply enough into this data to find out how well each pupil is doing from their individual starting point to help so that no groups lag behind.

Pupils say the school is improving because teachers do their best to make learning fun. Your strategies to make pupils' learning more purposeful are reaping rewards. The whole-class books show pupils have the opportunity to explore the world around them through creative and imaginative topics. For example, they talked with great enthusiasm about the recent tea party they planned and delivered for the school community. Pupils are keen to work hard; they are rapt listeners and enthusiastic writers when they are challenged to do their best. In contrast, some pupils often stray from their tasks because teachers' explanations or expectations are not clear. Teachers' marking has improved. Many teachers provide pupils with clear feedback. However, this guidance does not always help pupils to improve their work because they are not given time or expected to act on the good advice they receive.

Other leaders are beginning to improve their role, but a lack of urgency means the impact of their work is not making a difference to teaching and pupils' achievement. The subject leaders for mathematics have seized the opportunity to improve their own subject knowledge through an intensive training programme. With the support of a local authority consultant, they are using their updated skills to develop a more structured approach to teaching mathematics. The subject leaders for English have been slower off the mark. They have not taken a strong enough role in guiding staff or checking the quality of teaching in reading and writing. Middle leaders do not have an accurate understanding of how the school is performing because they are not using national data to pinpoint key weaknesses. This means strategies to bring about improvement are too slow. For example, the fall in the Year 1 phonics score has not been investigated well enough to tackle any shortcomings in teaching.

The governing body is fully aware that not all of the work completed since the October inspection has borne fruit. They are disappointed in the Year 2 and Year 6 results and they are anxious about the progress the school is making to become good. They have rightly recognised the activities they diligently carried out last year did not help them to get to the heart of the matter. As a result, they have re-grouped and set up stronger systems to keep a much closer eye on school data so they will not be surprised by outcomes next year.

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

You are open to advice and guidance. As a result, you have welcomed the support provided by the local authority. You believe the support has been of good quality and tailored well to meet the needs of the school. The local authority recognises the support in place last year did not make enough difference to moving the school forward. As a result, they have increased their level of support and challenge since the beginning of the academic year. Funding is available to place individual teachers on intensive training programmes to refresh their skills. A link with a local primary school has been established which means teachers have greater opportunities to observe good practice. A local authority officer is now visiting the school on a more frequent basis to keep an eye on the school's progress and ensure you are receiving the right support to bring about positive change.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wigan and the Director for Liverpool Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector