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Mrs Dawn Nulty
Headteacher
St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton
Flapper Fold Lane
Atherton
Manchester
Lancashire
M46 0HA

Dear Mrs Nulty

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton

Following my visit to your school on 4 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a Local Leader of Education who is orchestrating support for the school and a school development adviser from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection four families have removed their children and three other pupils have joined the school. A teacher has secured another post and is leaving the school at the end of term or soon after. A teacher who has been on maternity leave is returning to teach in Year 3 on a part-time basis early in December. The deputy

headteacher is now teaching in Year 2 each morning. The school is trying to second a teacher for a year to provide further capacity to the school. The teacher is to be funded by the local authority. The first attempt to appoint a teacher was not successful. The school has, therefore, approached the archdiocese to enlist its support in helping find a suitable teacher.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority has been monitoring and supporting the school for the last two years in response to concerns it had over a drop in results and instability in staffing. It commissioned a Local Leader in Education, who is the headteacher of a local school with a similar pupil intake and the leader of the consortia of schools that includes St Richard's. The support she orchestrated focused mainly on improving results in Key Stage 2. The summer 2013 national test results show that this was successful. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 in writing and mathematics increased markedly, although the proportion remained about the same in reading. The proportions of pupils who made the expected rates of progress from Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 also increased significantly in mathematics and writing, but less so in reading. The 2013 results in Key Stage 1 showed that in reading, writing and mathematics pupils did not achieve as well as in 2012.

The support of the Local Leader in Education and teachers from the consortia of schools continues to be the main planks of the local authority's support for the school since its inspection in September 2013. Support is being suitably focused now on the quality of teaching particularly in Key Stage 1 and on reading. A raft of training opportunities has been planned. The school development adviser has been keen for staff to see good and outstanding practice in other schools and for the school to be more outward-looking than in the past. This is being achieved as senior leaders and teachers are visiting other schools with particular purposes in mind. A good example is the visit the headteacher made to a local school to get a view of how headteachers' progress meetings with teachers can be highly effective. Based on this experience, meetings where teachers are held to account for the progress pupils in their class are making have been introduced. Records of these show they are properly focused on pupils who are underachieving with subsequent strategies devised to accelerate their progress. These include, for example, before school and lunchtime booster classes for more-able pupils that are administered by teaching assistants, who have been trained specifically for the task.

Teachers of proven high quality from other schools have also been allied to the school. They are focused on helping teachers whose teaching has been judged as less than good to improve their practice. Additionally, all teachers are accessing training to increase the effectiveness of their teaching. This has included the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make), mental mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar. All members of staff have undertaken tests to identify their needs in the teaching of literacy. Teachers are producing written evaluations of the training they receive. However, it would be more helpful if the

evaluations of the impact of the training were further down the line rather than straight after the training so they can report how effectively it has improved their teaching practice. A system of coaching has been planned that will link teachers in groups of three so they can observe and reflect on each other's practice. There are early signs that the quality of teaching is improving. Indications are that the school's milestone target of 60% of teaching at a good standard and 10% outstanding by the end of the autumn term has been achieved.

The school is dealing appropriately with the issue of inconsistent management of behaviour. Its actions are concentrated on heading off the need for fixed-term exclusions by using proactive strategies and support from outside agencies. The risk of exclusion has been reduced and there have been no exclusions since the last inspection.

The school is planning for subject leaders to be more accountable for the progress of pupils and the quality of teaching in their subject. Three new subject leaders have audited their subjects and are soon to present their action plans to the headteacher. All other subject leaders already have action plans in place. The school is now focusing on them developing a sharper understanding of standards in their subjects. The headteacher has plans to visit another school to see the way subject leaders are held to account elsewhere.

The school's action plan is being monitored on a half-termly basis by the headteacher and this is to be scrutinised by the governors' monitoring committee which meets for the first time next week. The first evaluation of the school's progress made by the headteacher against the actions in the plan is focused mainly on the tasks that have been completed rather than their impact on the quality of teaching and the achievements of the pupils. The headteacher and the Chair of Governors recognise that the positive difference the actions have on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes is of paramount importance and anticipate this coming to the fore as more data become available.

The school development adviser and the headteacher have worked closely together to compile the school's action plan and this forms a part of the local authority's statement of action. The plan includes useful milestone targets that are used to check if the school is on track toward its longer-term goals. The arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the plan are clear. They sensibly separate monitoring and evaluation duties to different people.

The Local Leader of Education and the school's development adviser have a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their involvement has been long standing and this puts them in a good position to appreciate the recent improvements school has made. The school's action plan is generally on track. There have been a few minor slippages due to training not being available at the time anticipated. However, the actions and targets for the training remain intact.

The governing body took good steps forward in improving the way it holds senior staff to account when the school first became a concern for the local authority two years ago. Governors have received training from the local authority's governor services section and have increased their understanding and questioning of the data about how well pupils are doing. Minutes of meetings show they are not passive recipients of information and do question the things they are told. A committee has been set up to monitor the implementation and impact of the school's action plan. The Chair of Governors appreciates that liaison between the governors' monitoring committee and local authority needs to be effective to ensure there is no duplication in monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children and Families for Wigan and the Archdiocese of Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Craven

Additional Inspector