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11 December 2013

Mrs Nicola Grant
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School,
Upton Street
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West Yorkshire
WF17 8PH

Dear Mrs Grant

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

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 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 July 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. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the monitoring of teaching with a clearer focus on how effectively pupils and groups of pupils achieve in lessons
- sharpen the school improvement plan to include clear and measurable targets against which success can be judged over-time
- agree key principles of effective practice in teaching and learning.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and senior staff, a group of pupils, governors, and a representative of the local authority. The inspector evaluated a range of documentation including development plans, the tracking of pupils' progress and records of lesson observations. In addition, the headteacher

took the HMI on a tour of the school to look briefly at teaching and learning and the changes made since the previous inspection.

Context

Since the inspection in July there have been changes to the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders. The lead teacher for mathematics has commenced maternity leave and in the short term has been replaced by an interim coordinator who will cover the role for next twelve months. In addition, one member of staff will leave the school at the end of coming term.

Main findings

Although clearly disappointed with the judgement, senior leaders and governors have quickly accepted that the outcomes and priorities from the recent inspection are the right ones and have done a great deal to lay the foundations for improvements in the quality of teaching and in distributing the skills of leaders more effectively. There is clear agreement on why the school is not yet good and the actions required. Staff are acting more decisively, expectations have been raised and as a result, the collective responsibility for improving the school has grown.

The revised school improvement plan addresses the main areas that need improvement and suitably underpinned by some appropriate milestones against which progress can be measured. However, some of the targets within the plan are not as sharp as they could be. This makes it difficult for leaders and governors to pinpoint with precision how well the school is improving over-time.

Effective steps have been taken to improve the quality of teaching. The regular reviews of pupils' learning alongside clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make mean that leaders are better placed to judge how well pupils are achieving and plan appropriate support. Systems to check on the quality of provision have been tightened. Feedback to pupils on the quality of their work is much improved. The teaching of reading and phonics has been reviewed and strengthened. However, further improvements are required in how senior leaders make judgements on the achievement of pupils in lessons and staff have yet to agree some key principles of what makes effective learning for pupils in all lessons.

Middle leaders are more focused in their work. Their ability to influence colleagues is increasing their potential to impact more effectively on school improvement.

Governance has moved on from the previous inspection. Governors have strengthened their understanding of the school's most pressing priorities and as a group, they understand what is being done to improve provision and the actions required. There is further work to be done to develop their confidence to act as a critical friend and hold senior leaders to account.

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 support from the local authority has been tailored well to the schools' most pressing priorities. This is helping to improve the quality of teaching and strengthen leadership, including governance. The local authority has responded to the school's request for support to develop the skills of individual teachers through the work of an advanced skills teacher. Additional guidance to senior leaders on strengthening the marking of pupils' work is in the pipeline.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kirklees.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector