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Ryan Langford
Headteacher
Holy Innocents Catholic Primary School
Mitchell Road
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Dear Mr Langford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holy Innocents Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 December, 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 September 2013. 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 and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- give more urgency to improving the quality of teaching
- sharpen the action plan so that it identifies the progress to be made by all pupil groups in reading, writing and mathematics
- strengthen the arrangements for monitoring the impact of the action plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of pupils from Key Stage 2, four members of the governing body and I made a telephone call to a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken

since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. Minutes of governing body meetings, achievement information and your records of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning were scrutinised. I joined you to visit all classrooms where we looked at pupils' English and mathematics books.

Context

Since the last inspection two new foundation governors have been appointed. The deputy headteacher will be leaving the school at the end of December. A temporary teacher has been appointed for two terms to teach Year 2. The governing body has appointed one of your current teachers to be the acting deputy headteacher for the spring and summer terms.

Main findings

You are a force for change, reflected in your view that you want a 'warts and all' approach to monitoring and improving the school. You are seeking a level of challenge that has not previously existed and have commissioned your own external improvement adviser to help with this. However, circumstances within the leadership team mean that you have been working too much on your own. You have focused too much on addressing issues such as the collection of assessment information, formulating action plans and strengthening governance, at the expense of urgently improving the quality of teaching and learning. Your plans to improve teaching by focusing every training opportunity on specific improvements are not adequately structured and leave too much to chance. You are not giving enough priority to your own regular monitoring of the quality of teaching. Consequently, you were disappointed and surprised with what we found when we looked at pupils' books in classrooms.

Pupils told me that teachers do not always expect them to work hard enough and that they can work much harder. Pupils' books show that the work does not always challenge them adequately and that there is an overreliance on repetitive and uninteresting worksheets. Marking has improved but is not consistently good. In some books, too much work remains unmarked and not all teachers give helpful comments for pupils to respond to, which will improve their work next time. The presentation in some pupils' books was shockingly poor and went unchallenged by teachers. In a few classes there was too little evidence of the work that pupils had completed for a whole term and in others there were far too few opportunities for pupils to write for extended periods of time. In these instances where teacher's expectations remain too low there is a significant chance of many pupils making less than expected progress.

You have improved the way in which assessment information is collected and this is enabling you to look more closely with governors at the progress of pupils in each class and to hold teachers to greater account. Your action plan identifies the

priorities that you need to address but does not give enough attention to the progress that you expect groups of pupils to make in key subjects given their starting points. Equally, you have not been specific enough about the arrangements for monitoring the impact of the actions that you take.

The governing body recognised that there was much to be done following the inspection. It moved swiftly to commission a review of governors' skills and has acted on the findings. The governors have been trained by the local authority to better understand assessment information and have reviewed their committee structure, so that they give greater emphasis to evaluating the quality of teaching and assessment information. The governing body has filled its vacancies with people who bring an educational background; so strengthening its ability to hold leaders to account. The governors visit the school more frequently and are planning joint monitoring activities with leaders, so that they are more skilled at evaluating information for themselves. As one governor said, 'this inspection has given us the tools that we needed to make things change.'

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

Since the inspection, the local authority has increased its support for the school and has plans to become more involved in monitoring its improvement. It has given some financial aid to the school, which has enabled you and the governors to decide from where you want to get the very best support and challenge that you can. However, the local authority continues to monitor the school's progress from a distance, relying too much on reports from visiting subject specialists. Plans to hold the school to account through a local authority steering group, which was programmed for November 2013, have slipped.

You are working hard to set up a partnership with a successful local school and have sought external funds to make this happen. The aim of this partnership, if successful, is to enable you to benefit from the experience of a headteacher who is a Local Leader of Education and provide additional support and training opportunities for your teachers and leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Director of Children's Services for Bromley.

Yours sincerely

Adam Higgins
Her Majesty's Inspector