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28 January 2014

Mrs Jackie Walker
Headteacher
St James Catholic Primary School
Cheriton Close
Off Underwood Road
Hattersley
Hyde
Cheshire
SK14 3DQ

Dear Mrs Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James Catholic Primary School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2014, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 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:

- sharpen the school action plan so it is clear about who is responsible for leading, monitoring and evaluating the various actions
- ensure that all staff are consistently following the feedback and planning procedures
- check on pupils' progress more frequently so that action can be taken even more rapidly to prevent them from underachieving.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the deputy head, the Chair and four other members of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to attend an assembly, accompany you on a tour of the school and look at some pupils' work.

Context

The Year 1 teacher is now on maternity leave and a supply teacher is teaching this class until July.

Main findings

You acknowledge that the recent inspection judgement was an accurate reflection of your school and you have used it as a catalyst for a renewed focus on improvement. Your action plan focuses closely on the areas for improvement which were highlighted in the inspection report. It gives a detailed account of actions and intended impact, but it is not always clear who is responsible for leading, monitoring and evaluating these specific actions. You gave all staff the opportunity to contribute to this plan and there is a sense that you are taking the whole school community with you on this journey of improvement.

The pupils I spoke to during my visit told me that since the inspection, teachers are doing things differently and this is helping them with their learning. As one girl said, 'Lessons have got better; they're more fun and educational at the same time.' Some teachers are using 'talk partners' in lessons and the pupils say they like this as they can run their ideas past each other and work through problems together. One pupil explained that using 'Three Before Me' is helping her to become less dependent on the teacher. Pupils could articulate very effectively how these new strategies were helping them to make progress but they are not being used consistently by all teachers. The new marking policy is also making a difference to pupils' learning, but some teachers are doing this more effectively than others.

You were already aware that improving achievement in mathematics needed to be a top priority. You have raised the profile of mathematics throughout the school and this is reflected in the displays in classrooms and corridors. Pupils are very keen to talk about what they are doing in mathematics. A Year 4 girl felt that knowing her times tables was helping her to progress in her mathematics work. A Year 5 boy was pleased he was doing more problem-solving activities as he could apply the skills he was developing here to other mathematical areas. Staff are using additional commercial teaching materials to strengthen pupils' understanding in mathematics. Pupils working on this programme can now confidently attempt a range of mathematical activities with which they previously had struggled.

In response to the recent inspection findings, you and the governors have committed a considerable amount of time and resources to a range of staff training, both in and out of school. Your training programme combines whole staff events with more bespoke sessions to ensure the greatest impact on pupils' learning. Personalised support and development offered to staff ranges from individual coaching from you, to external courses such as the 'Outstanding Teacher Programme'.

All pupils now have ambitious targets for mathematics and English and early indications show that the many of them are making good progress towards meeting them. Although you track pupils' progress, this does not take place frequently enough for the information to be used as effectively as it could be to identify which ones require extra help in order to make the best possible progress.

The very proactive and astute governing body plays a strong role in driving the school forward. Governors are very reflective about their own practice. They have planned strategically to build their own capacity and consequently, the governing body now has a range of expertise and skills but still reflects the local community which it serves.

Since the recent inspection, governors have changed the remit of the tracking working group to become more robust. Members of this group possess the sharp skills required to ask the right questions about pupils' learning and progress. Governors work very closely with senior leaders, and see the journey of improvement very much as a joint effort. The Chair of the Governing Body says, 'we are not just here to listen to the headteacher, but to see for ourselves.' Their support for the staff training is very focused on seeing the impact it is having on the learning in the classroom.

External support

The local authority has been closely involved with the school since the recent inspection. The local authority officer linked to the school has helped you with your action plan and delivered training to the whole staff on effective learning. She will follow this up with a series of joint observations with you and other senior leaders. She will also be involved in helping you to improve your quality assurance systems. You have already adopted the local authority lesson observation template and this has helped senior leaders focus more on pupils' learning and progress in the classroom. You very much value the support you have received from the local authority officer.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- < Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies