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Ms Gabrielle Eccles
Acting Headteacher
St Dunstan's RC Primary School
Bacup Street
Moston
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Dear Ms Eccles

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Dunstan's RC Primary School, Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 5 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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:

- build on connections already established with other outstanding schools as a means of ensuring all teachers, and therefore their pupils, benefit from observing and sharing outstanding practice.
- sharpen the action plan so that the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching can be measured in terms of their impact on improvements in the rate of progress made by pupils.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with the acting headteacher and the associate headteacher, other leaders, teachers, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body to

discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also held a conversation with a representative of the local authority prior to my visit and received an email summary of actions taken by the local authority to support for the school. I took the opportunity to tour the school to observe learning and looked at pupils' work. I read minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

St Dunstan's RC Primary School continues to experience turbulence due to changes in senior leadership. Since the inspection the acting headteacher (substantive deputy headteacher) and a class teacher have left. A teacher has been employed in order to replace the class teacher. A second teacher has been employed in order to increase the staff complement. The leadership team has been reshaped following the appointment of an associate headteacher and an acting headteacher, both from local outstanding schools.

Main findings

Unquestionably, the number one priority for leaders has been to raise the quality of teaching throughout the school in order to increase the rate of progress made by all pupils. Leaders have started to implement a comprehensive action plan designed primarily to improve the quality of teaching. The plan utilises links with two other outstanding schools by providing opportunities for teachers to observe examples of outstanding teaching and learning. Class teachers have responded quickly to the helpful and constructive feedback provided by middle leaders who observe them teaching. As a result of the adjustments that teachers have made to their teaching pupils' spoken to report that they feel a greater urgency to improve their learning. I saw evidence of an increased rate of progress both in pupils' books and in their work on display in classrooms and along corridors.

Leaders have acted swiftly to gain some quick wins to improve learning and behaviour as a means of moving the school forward rapidly. Pupils' handwriting has improved markedly following the introduction of regular, short handwriting practice sessions. Pupils are proud to have their best work displayed and they are also keen to stretch themselves to improve the quality of their writing.

Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly since the inspection. Pupils' spoken to said that things are much 'calmer' around school and in class and were adamant that this improvement is due to changes to the good behaviour reward system. This air of calm was observed in corridors and on visits to classrooms: pupils were seen holding discussions; waiting their turn and helping each other with mathematics tasks. There is no doubt that the improvement in pupils' behaviour is contributing to improvements in their rate of progress.

Leaders have made arrangements for teachers to visit two outstanding schools so that they can observe what outstanding teaching and learning look like. Teachers who have taken part in the visits told me that they have started to improve their practice immediately, especially in developing pupils' writing skills. While it is too early to see the full impact of these changes, pupils are already using 'working walls', displays of key words and phrases, to help them write more complex sentences. As a result teachers are being effective in stretching the vocabulary of pupils who are introducing words they have never used before into their writing.

Governors have taken prompt action to ensure they are in a strong position to challenge leaders effectively. Governors have appointed a National Leader of Governance who will support them in identifying how they improve their practice. Plans are in place to review both the composition of the governing body and the skills of individual governors in order that governors can effectively challenge leaders about the pace and extent of improvements made in the school.

External support

Movement towards becoming a good school is gaining momentum because leaders are drawing appropriately on the expertise of external partners. Representatives from the diocese and the local authority have been effective in supporting the school to build a new leadership team. Leaders from two local outstanding schools have been employed as associate headteacher and acting headteacher. Links with the outstanding schools are being used effectively to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders have brokered the use of literacy and numeracy consultants along with quality assurance visits by a local authority representative, all of which are contributing to the improved progress being made by pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector