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14 February 2014

Mrs Yvonne Mundy
Headteacher
St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School, Crawley
Southgate Drive
Crawley
West Sussex
RH10 6HD

Dear Mrs Mundy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School, Crawley

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 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:

- sharpen action plans to ensure they are precise about what the school hopes to achieve and who will be monitoring progress in each area
- ensure the temporary nature of senior leadership does not undermine work to improve the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the acting assistant headteacher and the consultant headteacher. I also met with a governor, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I looked at pupils' books and at teachers' planning documents for mathematics. In addition, we visited lessons

briefly to look particularly at the challenge provided for pupils in mathematics. I examined the single central record of checks on staff.

Context

You have been confirmed as the acting headteacher with a newly promoted acting assistant headteacher. Governors have not yet been successful in appointing a substantive headteacher, and are only now advertising nationally for this post. The consultant headteacher provided by the diocese is now working with the school for half a day a week, a reduction from two days a week last term. Two new support staff and two new teachers have been appointed since the inspection.

Main findings

You have worked with steady commitment to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection and standards have continued to rise.

Following changes to their roles leaders now have more time to focus on the quality of teaching. This is ensuring greater consistency from teachers in terms of their expectations of how well pupils can achieve. However, this is not yet the case for all teachers.

Your improvement planning addresses all the areas identified in the inspection, but lacks sharpness in the way in which you identify success criteria and what the impact of your actions will be on how well pupils achieve. Currently, you have not identified who will monitor the progress of work in different parts of the plan, which prevents governors and others accurately assessing how well the school is moving towards becoming a good school.

Teaching and planning for mathematics has benefited from the specialist support of the consultant headteacher and it has improved significantly as a result. Training for teachers in this area, followed up by targeted lesson observations from leaders has resulted in teachers focusing more sharply on the needs of different groups of pupils. In our visits to classrooms it was evident that more-able pupils were being better challenged by demanding and interesting work. Teaching assistants are now working more effectively in classrooms alongside the teachers and at least one problem solving activity a week is now included in all mathematics teaching. Pupils' work in this subject shows clear signs of improvement this term.

Your confident projections for pupil achievement in summer 2014 show high proportions of pupils making expected and more than expected progress in mathematics; a significant and rapid improvement.

You have implemented particularly focused work with children in Year 6 who have English as a second language and as a result their reading has improved rapidly.

Targeted teaching for children in Year 6 who need additional support to catch up with their peers began recently; it is too early to assess the impact of this work.

Your intensified focus on marking and feedback to pupils is already bearing fruit. Pupils' books showed good evidence of how they reflect on teachers' comments, and learn from them to make better progress.

Since the inspection, the introduction of staff meetings focusing on achievement has developed mutual support for teachers who now share best practice and evaluate their work in terms of their impact on outcomes. For example, these teams have developed a new policy on how the school will challenge more-able pupils, including clearer identification of these children. This is already showing impact in the work that is being done in classrooms. Teachers have not yet had opportunities to visit other schools to see outstanding teaching, and this would be useful.

The impermanence of the current senior leadership hinders the longer term strategic direction of the school. The school is continuing to move forward because of well-established processes but there is not enough evidence of an ambitious vision for the future. Governors challenge school leaders knowledgeably, particularly about standards of pupil achievement, and they visit the school regularly to check what is happening in practice. Since the inspection, they have increased the intensity of their scrutiny in all areas and have become more strategic in their thinking.

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 local authority continues to support the school well, offering funding as well as coaching for teachers. The local authority advisor holds the school to account robustly through twice-termly meetings and reviews of achievement data. You and the governors agree that this support is valuable.

The diocese offers limited assistance other than making arrangements to broker the support of the consultant headteacher. The diocese does not hold the school to account rigorously, although some analysis of the progress data of pupils in the school takes place. A representative of the diocese meets termly with the senior advisor of the local authority to discuss the progress of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex and the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector