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Mr Paul Gibbons
Headteacher
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School
Lock Lane
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Dear Mr Gibbons

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, Trafford

Following my visit to your school on 17 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 January 2014. 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 ensure that:

- teachers' marking improves allowing it to make a more effective contribution to pupils' learning
- the review of governance is completed as soon as possible with any recommendations being used to plan the next stage of development for governors
- improvement is secure and sustained so that the levels of external support can be reduced by the end of this school year.

Evidence

Meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, subject leaders for numeracy and literacy, pupils, the Chair of Governors and two other governors, a representative of the local authority and a consultant working with the school. The school's post-Ofsted action plan and other documents were evaluated. Samples of Year 2, 5 and 6 pupils' work were reviewed. Classrooms were visited accompanied by the headteacher.

Main findings

Leaders and governors responded rapidly to the inspection by speeding up improvement begun at the start of the year. The confidence of leaders and governors has increased. They are setting a clear direction for the school. The post-Ofsted action plan is effective. It sets high expectations and provides clear information on actions and tight timescales for these to be achieved so that those involved can check that progress is sufficiently rapid. Governors have still to review the full plan. This will be done in the very near future.

The noticeable improvements in the quality of teaching seen in the inspection have continued. However, teaching is not yet consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils do as well as possible. Leaders know about the quality of teaching and are taking determined action to ensure it improves further. Leaders' tracking of the effectiveness of teachers' work is regular and detailed. It leads to well-planned training which helps teachers to improve their practice and supports wider improvement.

Marking is inconsistent. Teachers have different expectations of how pupils should respond to comments in their exercise books. Display of pupils' work is used to help children's learning. The initial results for the new literacy programme are encouraging. Plans to change the timetable to allow writing to be given a higher priority in all subjects are being considered.

Pupils are making faster progress. The latest data on pupils' achievement shows gains across the school. Current indications are that the achievement of Year 6 pupils in their national, end of Key Stage 2 tests will be much higher than in 2013.

Leaders' expectations of how teachers should use information on pupils' achievement have been increased. Meetings to discuss pupils' progress now hold teachers to account better because subject leaders are involved as well as teachers and senior leaders. Careful analysis of the progress made by individual pupils from their different starting points is used to build up a picture of how groups of pupils are performing. This information is used to plan teaching so that pupils do not fall behind.

Systems to allow leaders to organise the work of the school and to check that this is effective have improved. Leaders' checks on teaching include regular lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' books and discussion with teachers. Plans for teachers to visit effective local primary schools to observe good and outstanding practice are nearing completion.

Improvements to governance have started but are still at an early stage. Governors are becoming more involved in the school and understanding more about the detail of its work. This is allowing them to provide better support and challenge to the headteacher. The proportion of new governors is relatively high. The training provided for governors by the consultant working with the school has been welcomed particularly by those who joined the governing body recently. This training has been effective in ensuring that governors' knowledge about their role and expertise has rapidly increased. A review of governance was not recommended in the inspection report. However, such a review has been organised through the partnership with a local teaching school. This is an important step in allowing governors to understand how they can improve further. There are plans to strengthen the Governing Body by appointing two experienced governors from the teaching school.

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

Support by the local authority is effective. Regular meetings led by local authority officers include key partners working with the school. These meetings provide robust challenge and appropriate support to the headteacher. The local authority worked in partnership with the school to set up a link with Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College, a local teaching school. The headteacher of Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College, who is a National Leader of Education, is providing leadership support to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School. The link has also led to the appointment of a consultant, who was previously the headteacher of an effective primary school. The consultant is providing highly effective support which has led to improvement in teaching, subject leadership and governance. Leaders, governors and partners recognise that, over the remainder of this school year, improvement at the school must become embedded so that the level of support can reduce.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector