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28 March 2014

Mrs Anita Fagan
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE Primary School
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Dear Mrs Fagan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE Primary School, Trafford

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 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:

- revise the current improvement plan to ensure that a small number of specific actions are identified which will directly tackle gaps in teachers' subject knowledge. This should enable them to continue to develop their skills and improve their confidence in teaching the full range of subjects discretely
- continue the work already started in developing the effective leadership of subjects
- continue to strengthen the impact of subject leaders by making them responsible for developing their subjects. This can be achieved through the

provision of appropriate ideas and resources in order to improve outcomes and enjoyment for pupils as well as develop literacy across the curriculum

- build specific targets into subject leaders' performance reviews which provide clear evidence for their impact in improving learning.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself and your deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing body as well as a group of pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with the local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. The school's development plan was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with yourself and your deputy provided evidence of the range of work being carried out across the school. Documentation, including the lesson observation file and subject leader development plans, was also scrutinised.

Context

Since the inspection several significant changes have been made to school routines. The school day now starts at 8:40 with pupils initially involved in a range of skills based activities such as handwriting. In addition, setting by ability has been introduced in mathematics and the teaching of phonics. A new teaching assistant has been appointed to replace a colleague who has left is the only staffing change of note.

Main findings

The momentum for improvement was started when you took up post in September, prior to the inspection, and this is being maintained. The development plan provides a sound basis for improvement with most of the actions appropriate and firmly focussed on the key issues which were identified in the recent Ofsted inspection report. Improving teaching and learning and subject leadership are especially well prioritised. Several initiatives, for example the development of writing skills, are well linked to clear and specific actions such as setting in phonics, promoting basic skills training as well as 'Big Write' sessions where pupils get used to writing for an extended period of time and for clear purpose. Subject specific training, brokered through the local authority, is clearly identified, but it is less clear how this will be used to improve subject teaching in each individual classroom. The plan could be simplified further to ensure that one or two very specific actions are identified which will directly improve teacher knowledge and expertise to teach the full range of subjects with greater confidence. For example, the science subject leader could ensure that pupils have regular access to quality practical experiments in order to develop their interest in scientific discovery and enquiry. Similarly, in history the use of primary and secondary sources could be a focus for improvement or developing the teaching of map skills in geography for example.

The school's performance data show that standards are improving. The curriculum is also being reviewed to ensure it is more appropriate and provides a clear structure for developing learning in subjects as well as in literacy and numeracy. Subject leaders have also audited provision in their areas of responsibility and produced action plans to improve practice. However, these tend to be generic and there is a need to focus on specific strategies to improve teaching in the classroom. Support by teachers from the partner school been provided for those classes where teaching was judged to be less than good. This has included coaching, team teaching as well as joint lesson planning.

Pupils were very positive about the changes you have initiated both before and noticeably after the inspection. They are particularly appreciative about the improved and purposeful atmosphere that is evident around the school. 'We are like one big happy family' and the school is a 'happier' place were just some of the comments made. They feel that behaviour, which was judged good during the inspection, is now even better because your deputy and yourself are clearly visible around the school and are also supportive of events after school. They feel that the variety of enrichment and after school activities is now much greater than previously. They also note that there is more rigour in lessons with a noticeable crackdown on poor presentation of work. Greater involvement of staff at all levels in the activities the school offers is also more noticeable.

Governors are firmly committed to ensuring that improvements are quickly made and that any weaknesses challenged. A post-Ofsted action plan cluster group has been set up, comprising of senior school leaders, the headteacher from the supporting school, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. This group meets regularly to get feedback on the progress being made. Governors are fully supportive and knowledgeable about the actions being taken to move the school towards becoming good.

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

St Mary's was a light touch school prior to the inspection but support is now more frequent and focused. The local authority has provided a small amount of additional funding to support training, especially for subject leaders. In addition it is actively involved in monitoring improvements and has also brokered assistance from a nearby outstanding school which is providing both good advice and a range of appropriate support.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector