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Paula Smith
Headteacher
St John Catholic Primary School
Berry Lane
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Rickmansworth
WD3 7HG

Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 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 December 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. Governors should take further action to:

- Establish rigorous procedures to monitor the impact of the consultant headteacher on improving the quality of school leadership.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of Governors and the local authority improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and documents relating to current pupil achievement and the monitoring of teaching and learning were scrutinised. I made short visits to all classes with you, looked at pupils' books and spoke to them about their work.

Context

Since the inspection in December, two new governors have been elected, one teacher has left the school and one has been appointed.

Main findings

Your post-Ofsted action plan includes appropriate timescales and actions for improvement. It has clear expectations against which success will be measured, relevant allocation of responsibilities and it effectively shows how planned improvement will be monitored.

Your absence, and that of other leaders, has been unavoidable, as a consequence there has been some slippage in meeting deadlines. The most important actions have been prioritised by interim leaders. Rigorous and effective actions have been taken by senior leaders and governors to hold staff to account and to make the changes necessary to improve the quality of teaching. It does however, remain variable and where it is not good enough pupils are not making the progress they are capable of.

You have implemented new systems of monitoring the quality of teaching which are enabling you to evaluate its impact on pupils' learning behaviour as well as the progress they make in lessons. As yet, you are not using these systems to give teachers specific enough guidance on what they need to do to improve their practice further.

There is emerging evidence of the impact of changes made to improve pupils' acquisition of writing skills. This work has been led knowledgeably and effectively by the Deputy Headteacher. As a result, teachers have an improved understanding of the process and sequence of teaching writing. Written work is marked using the agreed policy in most classes and where this is strongest, the guidance given to pupils on how to improve their work is improving their skills quickly. Pupils in Year 6 explained how this marking, as well as new systems which engage them in identifying the aspects of writing they most need to improve, is helping them to learn more quickly.

The restructured approach to teaching pupils phonics, the sounds that letters make, means that pupils are making better progress in developing early writing skills. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are more engaged in writing, for example, a role play garage is enticing boys to write more as they book cars in for service. In Year 2, well differentiated planning included extra challenge for more-able pupils and there is good evidence of pupils' response to effective marking helping to move their learning on quickly.

In some instances, there are very good examples of the positive impact of the 'outstanding teaching' training some staff have attended on rapidly improving their practice. This includes the implementation of working walls which, where they are used well, are stimulating and supporting pupils to make good progress in lessons.

You are currently receiving a significant amount of support from the local authority and more recently, from a consultant headteacher which is giving you the capacity to bring about the necessary improvements. You are not yet however, demonstrating the rigour and quality of leadership necessary without this support to continue the improvement started.

New members of the governing body bring relevant and local expertise including particularly useful experience of the analysis of pupil achievement data. The Chair of Governors has been unequivocal in setting expectations of governors, ensuring they receive training and in implementing a work plan identifying key actions and responsibilities aligned with the action plan. The governing body is now well organised and sufficiently informed to hold school leaders rigorously to account against the expectations of improved leadership and performance.

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 has provided good support during a challenging time for the school. The improvement partner knows the school well and has been instrumental in securing the current improvements through providing you with a mixture of coaching and advice. Working with the Chair of Governors, she has brokered the support of an experienced consultant headteacher for a day a week to bring your action plan back on track and increase the rigour of leadership.

A teaching and learning adviser has effectively supported the improvements made to the teaching of writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector