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Catherine Dalzell
Headteacher
Maryvale Catholic Primary School
Old Oscott Hill
Kingstanding
Birmingham
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Dear Mrs Dalzell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Maryvale Catholic Primary School, Birmingham

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 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:

- ensure that mathematical activities provide pupils of different abilities with an appropriate level of challenge
- strengthen teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- encourage pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. HMI also met with the headteacher of Boldmere Junior School and the headteacher of Little Sutton Primary School. They are both national leaders of education. A range of documentation was reviewed including feedback to staff following lesson observations, brief visits to classrooms and reviews of pupils work,

and the latest information about pupils' achievement. You joined me on brief visits to classrooms to review reading and mathematics activities and to talk to pupils about their learning. We also reviewed some pupils' work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in February 2013, the headteacher and five teachers have left the school. You joined the school in September 2013. At the same time the governing body appointed an assistant headteacher; a teacher to take responsibility for leading developments in English; and a class teacher. In April 2014, the governing body appointed a teacher to take responsibility for mathematics.

Main findings

You have a clear understanding of the actions that need to be taken to help the school move to good. You have strengthened the systems for managing the performance of staff and you have taken determined action to tackle weaknesses in teaching. Your records show that teaching is improving and pupils are making faster progress than in the past.

Actions taken to raise achievement in reading have been particularly successful. During our brief visits to lessons we observed pupils in Years 1 and 2 successfully using their knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics) while reading. In Years 3 to 6, pupils were carefully reading their texts to find specific pieces of information and answer a range of questions. A group of pupils in Year 6 were particularly enjoying reading a newspaper to collate facts about the World Cup. Your latest achievement information shows that pupils are making at least expected progress in reading, and increasing proportions are making good progress.

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection visit in June 2013, HMI found that teachers were often asking pupils of different abilities to complete the same mathematical activities. This situation has improved markedly. Our brief visits to lessons confirmed that teachers are getting better at planning mathematical work for pupils of different abilities. Nevertheless, you recognise that the activities for more-able pupils are occasionally too simple and too complex for pupils who need extra help. Work in pupils' books confirmed this to be the case. You acknowledge that in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the activities that teachers plan do not always help children make sufficient progress. This is particularly the case when children work by themselves. Your plans for strengthening further the teaching of mathematics and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage are appropriate.

During this visit, pupils were keen to tell us what they were learning and to show us their work. Pupils told me that the introduction of a 'pen licence' has encouraged them to take greater pride in the presentation of their work. We observed pupils in most classes responding promptly and listening carefully to teachers and teaching assistants' instructions. However, we also found that some pupils were not taking

sufficient responsibility for their own learning. For instance, when a few pupils were struggling to complete their work, they waited for the teacher or the teaching assistant to notice rather than seek help. Similarly, we observed some pupils repeatedly making spelling errors in their writing rather than using a dictionary while they worked.

With effective support from you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and the teachers with responsibility for English and mathematics are using information about the progress of different groups of pupils to accurately identify where further improvements are required. They are using this information well to identify the actions they need to take to help pupils make good progress. Senior leaders regularly check the work of teachers. However, their individual feedback to teachers following observations of lessons and reviews of pupils' work does not always focus enough on the actions teachers should take to help specific groups of pupils make better progress.

Governors have benefited from a wide range of local authority training, and support from the national leaders in education and a national leader of governance. Consequently, they have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They are for instance checking how pupil premium funding is spent and the difference it is making to pupils. You are providing governors with helpful information. This is enabling governors to ask searching questions about pupils' achievement and teaching.

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 arranged for senior leaders and staff at Maryvale to work with the headteacher and staff of Boldmere Junior School. This link has been extended to include the headteacher and staff of Little Sutton Primary School. The headteachers and staff from these schools have provided you and staff at Maryvale with useful support and guidance. You have been proactive in establishing links with a number of other successful schools and organising a wide range of training for staff and senior leaders. This combined support has contributed to the improvements in teaching and senior leadership at the school. Similarly, training and support for governors has had a beneficial impact on the work of the Governing Body.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector