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12 June 2014

Mrs Joanne Heap
Acting Executive Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bacup
Tong Lane
Bacup
Lancashire
OL13 9LJ

Dear Mrs Heap

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bacup, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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 there is effective induction of new staff starting in the autumn term so that the positive momentum created through improved teaching and school management systems is maximised
- improve the standard of presentation of pupils' work through raising teachers' and pupils' expectations of what constitutes good quality.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the acting headteacher, the substantive deputy headteacher and two representatives of the local authority to

discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Brief visits were made to all classes and the school's monitoring records completed since the last inspection were scrutinised.

Context

You have continued to lead the school as executive headteacher for two and a half days per week. The acting headteacher is in school on a full-time basis. These arrangements began in January 2014 and will continue until the end of the summer term. The substantive headteacher at the time of the previous inspection resigned his post in March 2014 and the governors have begun the process of appointing a successor for January 2015. The local authority is seeking to secure interim leadership arrangements until this appointment is made. A teacher has returned from maternity leave. A newly qualified teacher has been appointed to start in September 2014. The school is seeking to appoint two other teachers to replace teachers who are leaving to take up posts elsewhere. Pupil numbers have remained stable.

Main findings

The school agrees that the judgements made at its recent section 5 inspection were fair. An improvement plan has been drawn up in immediate response to the inspection findings and this is underpinned by supporting action plans to develop teaching and boost progress in reading, speaking and mathematics. A well-judged programme of continuing professional development has been put into place. This has included teachers observing the teaching of reading in a local school where there is recognised good practice. Teachers have adapted their own work in response to these observations and your monitoring of pupils' progress indicates that there has been an improvement in reading across the school.

Similar improvements are being noted in mathematics with a renewed focus on developing consistency in teaching through revisiting what the whole school calculations policy means for individual classes, including raising expectations of what higher-attaining pupils should achieve. Pupil progress meetings have been developed that ensure that staff consider, on a regular basis, how well pupils are achieving from their relative starting points. Pupils themselves do not currently contribute to these discussions, however pupils are being given more opportunities to talk about their work as well as about their thoughts and feelings more generally.

The school's tracking of pupils' progress has been improved so that leaders, teachers and governors now receive accurate, reliable information on how well groups of pupils are doing. This means that governors are better-placed to evaluate the school's effectiveness, including the impact of pupil premium funding and arrangements to support the most able pupils towards achieving their potential.

The governors appreciate the comprehensive picture of the school's performance that they now receive and they feel equipped to ask challenging questions of the school's leaders. An external review of governance, recommended following the recent section 5 inspection, has been commissioned and is scheduled to take place later in the summer term.

The leadership provided by you along with the acting headteacher and substantive deputy has provided the school with firm foundations for further improvement. Achievement is rising, although greater consistency of approach and more robust leadership of teaching have come too late for pupils leaving school this summer whose progress is not as strong as that in other year groups.

Since the section 5 inspection, teachers have been identified to lead on non-core subjects. These leadership roles are new within the school. Paired working with teachers from a local school is developing teachers' confidence to undertake their duties. They appreciate the clear and unequivocal direction they now receive. As one stated, 'teachers are now empowered to make decisions and to use their skills to make the school better.'

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 the school with necessary intensive support, both in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and in securing interim leadership arrangements during a period of turbulence. You and the acting headteacher have been seconded by the local authority because of your proven capacity and they are now looking to secure high calibre interim leaders until a substantive headteacher is appointed.

The school adviser, along with the adviser from Lancashire's monitoring and intervention team (MIT) have worked in partnership with you to raise standards. They have supported your action planning and discussed with you how success will be measured. They have rigorously moderated your observations of teaching through undertaking scrutinies of pupils' work and joint lesson observations. They have also provided training on the relationship between letters and sounds they make (phonics) and on mentoring of pupils to learn as well as they can. An adviser attends some governing body meetings and the local authority will conduct the planned review of governance. The impact of this support is evident in the more consistently effective ways in which teachers are working to raise pupils' achievement.

You have also valued the support of two partner schools who have shared practice on different aspects of teaching and behaviour management with staff at St Mary's. These fruitful partnerships are set to continue and will enable you to maintain

contact with the school's new leaders once you have returned to your substantive post. The local authority's human resources team and child protection personnel have offered useful advice to the school. In addition, the Whitworth cluster of schools has supported the sharing of good practice, for instance by enabling teachers across all year groups to moderate their judgements of pupils' writing; this has led to greater accuracy in teachers' assessments.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector