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Lisa Atkins
Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Loughborough, Leicestershire
Beacon Road
Loughborough
LE11 2BG

Dear Ms Atkins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Loughborough, Leicestershire

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 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 June 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:

- increase the rates of progress made by pupils in years 4 to 6, particularly in mathematics
- monitor more closely the progress of disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding
- use the best practice available from other schools in the academy trust to help improve the quality of teaching
- amend the academy action plan, ensuring it lists the individuals responsible for monitoring and evaluating actions, so that impact can be judged more clearly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, two assistant headteachers, six representatives of the Governing Body and two representatives of the academy trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the academy action plan. You took me on a tour of the school and we visited every class to see the learning that was taking place.

Context

You are new to the academy and became headteacher at the beginning of this term. One new governor has joined the governing body since the last inspection.

Main findings

In 2014, a greater proportion of pupils made the progress expected of them than in 2013. This applied to key stages 1 and 2 across all subject areas. However, progress in mathematics at key stage 2 still requires improvement; senior leaders and classroom teachers are taking steps to address this. Further, the achievement data provided by senior leaders for the current year groups 4 to 6 indicate that rates of progress need to improve for these pupils.

Teachers and senior leaders are undertaking a significant amount of work to improve achievement in mathematics. The leader with responsibility for mathematics has introduced resources matched to the new curriculum. These provide guidance and advice for teachers which have helped improved the consistency of teaching. The leader of mathematics has also led two staff training sessions to improve teachers' subject knowledge. The impact of this was observed in a Year 2 lesson in which the teacher taught a lesson using strategies taken directly from the training; there was a high level of pupil engagement.

You have introduced a new system of setting pupils by ability in mathematics. Pupils across the school join one of fifteen groups for weekly lessons closely matched to their specific ability level. This has been well-received by pupils, one of whom said, 'It was challenging and not too easy. It was nice to see everyone having fun.' Early morning sessions for those pupils who require extra support in mathematics will begin later this term.

To ensure these new strategies are having a positive impact on achievement, you plan to test pupils every six weeks; as this has not yet happened, it is too early to judge impact in this regard. Much will depend on how the information gathered is used. It is important that teachers and senior leaders monitor more closely the progress of the very few pupils who have special educational needs and those who are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Shortly after the recent inspection, staff training took place that explored how teachers can improve learning by asking more challenging questions. Revised lesson planning requirements now direct teachers to consider specific questions to ask. Recent observations conducted by the leader with responsibility for literacy showed these strategies were having a positive impact.

The governing body met shortly after the inspection to discuss the findings; it is to meet at the end of this month to plan its activity for the year. The governing body intends to increase its engagement with parents; as a result, several governors will attend a meeting on 23rd September when school leaders will explain to parents how best they can support their children in their learning. The link governor for mathematics has set up a programme of regular monitoring visits which will begin later this month. Governors have arranged training for themselves on conducting effective school visits and on how best to manage the performance of the headteacher. The recommended external review of governance has begun but is not yet complete. Overall, much appropriate governor activity is imminent but is yet to take place and therefore no impact of this can be judged. However, governors are fully aware of the academy's areas for development and are committed to improving their practice.

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

You are scheduled to attend local authority training for new headteachers. The academy trust has promoted collaboration between its schools, particularly in developing good practice in the leadership of mathematics and literacy. However, senior leaders should make much better use of the best practice available in the trust's other schools, particularly with regards to observing outstanding teaching. The trust's board of directors are to meet later this month to agree on a bespoke package of support for the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Leicestershire, the Director of Education at the Nottingham Roman Catholic Diocese, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector