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Mrs Elaine Grimshaw
Headteacher
St Antony's RC Primary School
Shadsworth Road
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Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Grimshaw

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Antony's RC Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 April 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- as a matter of urgency, clarify the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders in the school to ensure that the management of the school is secure, focussed and in a position to improve teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils. In particular there is a need to ensure that monitoring of provision is more frequent and rigorous.
- review and complete the curriculum plan to ensure that there is a clear focus on teaching the new requirements of the National Curriculum effectively.

- review and amend the post-Ofsted action plan to ensure that simple and practical ways in which classroom teaching and improved outcomes for pupils can be developed and that these are clearly identified and actioned. For example the more effective use of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage or developing a more effective strategy for encouraging home reading and reading for enjoyment for pupils.
- ensure that whole school policies such as a calculation or writing policy are being carried out consistently in all classrooms across the school.
- implement a strategy to develop middle leaders so they can support teachers to build up their confidence and subject knowledge in order to enable them to deliver quality lessons across a full range of subjects.
- build specific targets linked to improving subject knowledge and pedagogy into performance management objectives.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself and the Chair of the Governing Body as well as a group of pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with a senior officer from the local authority and the school improvement partner, who supported you during the previous academic year. At these meetings I discussed the actions taken since the last inspection, the progress being made and the level of support being provided. The school's development and curriculum plans were evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with senior leaders focussed on the learning environment around the school.

Context

There have been limited staffing changes since the previous inspection. A teacher has retired and been replaced and two classes are currently being covered while the substantive classroom teachers are on maternity leave. There has also been some minor restructuring of responsibilities.

Main findings

The achievement of pupils continues to cause concern despite some recent improvement at the end of Key Stage 2. Progress remains inconsistent across the school and overall standards are below national levels. In general, boys outperform girls and there is an over-reliance on intervention strategies to boost outcomes for pupils.

The post-Ofsted action plan lacks the specific detail needed to address many of the points for improvement raised by the most recent inspection. For example 'peer coaching in planning Super Learning days and reading and writing about different countries' will not, in itself, improve teaching across the curriculum, particularly in reading and writing. Similarly, undertaking learning walks to focus on high achievers and sampling will identify issues but will not address the core concern of providing more challenging work for the most able. Milestones tend to focus more on proposed monitoring actions rather than being linked to improved outcomes for pupils. Also, many of these proposed actions are not supported by relevant or appropriate training. For example, 'updating portfolios' will not improve the skills of subject leaders. The plan needs to be revised to include simple, yet effective actions which are aimed at direct impact in the classroom or will develop the skills and expertise of subject leaders. For example, ensuring that, as a matter of policy, pupils have easy access to and are expected to use dictionaries and thesauruses on a day to day basis to improve spelling, widen vocabulary and develop writing across the curriculum.

Although the pupils, who were interviewed, were generally positive about the school, they had not noticed anything that had changed since the inspection, especially regarding improved classroom practice. The only thing they commented about was the new school uniform of which they were very proud. They felt that many lessons were not necessarily easy but neither were they difficult. Most of these pupils interviewed were negative about reading and they did not read for pleasure. The monitoring of teaching and learning has been very much dependant on your deputy. In her absence, there is no evidence to suggest that rigorous monitoring procedures have been maintained. Equally, there has been little constructive work to implement the new national curriculum effectively and this continues to be a process which remains under review. Very limited evidence was produced to identify how the curriculum has been planned or how it is being delivered. Currently, the school is ill prepared and resourced to enable teachers to deliver the new national curriculum with confidence. During the learning walk around the school, concerns were also raised about inconsistencies across classrooms in implementing some basic teaching strategies. For example, the way in which pupils completed simple calculations in mathematics which was leading to basic errors.

Although there is a desire to change, currently, there is no sense of urgency or clear direction in how to improve provision. During the absence of the deputy headteacher, leaders have not shown the capacity to be able to move the school forward. The chair of governors is aware of the issues facing the school and a strategy is being formulated in partnership with the local authority and diocese to address shortcomings. The current crisis has made it clear that governors need to be more pro-active in challenging and holding school management to account. There is a very clear understanding that current issues need to be resolved quickly if the school is to improve.

External support

The local authority has previously expressed concerns about the low standards and the lack of urgency with which management was implementing change and improvement. Support offered has not always been accepted. The school improvement partner has made regular diagnostic visits and provided advice and offered to broker support. There is an ongoing and positive commitment from the local authority that additional support will be provided in the immediate future. This includes fortnightly monitoring visits, a full review of provision and progress later this term as well as regular monitoring meetings comprising of school leaders and governor, local authority and diocesan representatives. In addition' support for leadership is being brokered with a nearby high performing school. The intention is to engage more actively with the school to bring about much needed change and make leadership more effective.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector