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30 September 2014

Mr G Gilroy
Headteacher
St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Walsall
Blue Lane East
Walsall
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Dear Mr Gilroy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Walsall

Following my visit to your school on 29 September 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. Please pass on my thanks to the members of staff and governors, and the representatives of the local authority and diocesan board who gave of their time to meet me.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The school was judged to require improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

- make sure that all action plans do not spread effort too widely but focus specifically on the most pressing areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. Relatively less important areas should be put to one side in the short term
- for each of the areas for improvement, set a small number of specific and measurable targets. Leaders and governors need to be sure that the targets are a reflection of what is needed for the school's overall effectiveness to be judged good. Refine the programme for monitoring

so that it becomes a strategy for checking progress towards these targets

- make sure that the targets in the whole-school improvement plan are reflected in the subject action plans that underpin it
- strengthen the role that governors will play in tracking the implementation of the plan and checking the impact of actions
- make sure that the process of agreeing and setting targets for individual teachers as part of their performance management begins straight away.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the local authority and the diocesan board to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and the action plans for literacy and mathematics were evaluated. Assessment information and predictions for the current Year 6 were reviewed. I toured the school with you and visited every classroom.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing since the section 5 inspection.

Main findings

I could see that the outcome of the inspection in July was a disappointment to everyone. Nevertheless, the inspection report highlights that improvements had been made and makes clear that the school was moving in the right direction from its previous inspection in November 2012. The results of national tests and assessments for last year's Year 6 were encouraging and confirmed an upward trend, but also indicated that there is still some work to be done, particularly in improving the proportion of pupils who attain the expected level in all three of reading, writing and mathematics, and in pupils' understanding and use of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

You are confident that the leadership structure currently in place is strong and fit for purpose. Middle leaders spoke of the steps they are already taking to add to the drive for improvement. There is a sense of collective responsibility and an understanding, shared by governors, the local authority and the diocesan board, that the case is now urgent.

You have drawn up a plan in response to the areas for improvement identified in July. The plan covers the three main areas for development and includes action that is appropriate. You have not wasted time while the plan is being constructed but

have taken some action already, for example, training for staff in challenging the more-able pupils. The plan contains many success criteria but none are measurable. There is also an intention to check the impact of every step that is taken using a range of methods. This means that the plan is cumbersome and not strategic or sharply focused. A programme of monitoring activities has been put in place for this half term, including lesson observations, scrutinies of pupils' books and teachers' plans. It is not clear how the activities in this monitoring programme dovetail with what is set out in the improvement plan. Setting out a smaller number of overarching success criteria and establishing which activities in the monitoring programme will provide evidence towards each one would streamline the plan and make it less unwieldy.

Actions are not prioritised precisely and the timescales are too broad to guide the process of monitoring implementation and evaluating the impact.

How the governing body will check the impact of actions and hold leaders to account for progress is not explicit in much of the plan, other than in the action point concerning leadership and management. How and when governors will check on progress needs to be more clearly spelled out.

The individual plans for literacy and mathematics also contain appropriate actions and deal with the main areas requiring improvement. However, they also focus on aspects that are less urgent at this time and which will not have a significant impact in the short term in moving the school's performance to good. For example, training all staff in the use of sign language will not have a major impact on improving pupils' performance in writing.

Teachers have not yet been set targets for their own performance but I note that this is scheduled for the autumn term. As this is one of the aspects of leadership that was highlighted in the inspection report it is important that this does not slip and that the governing body checks that it has happened.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I would be grateful if you could send me a copy of your plan for improvement when it is finalised. In addition, I would like to receive a copy of your reports to the governing body as and when you make them.

External support

You and your staff are receptive to support from the local authority, the diocesan board and other schools. You are already working with other schools, for example, to moderate assessments. The local authority is putting together a package of support and also intends to visit once a term to check on progress. It is important that this support is tailored to the school's most pressing needs and that the school

is given the opportunity to demonstrate that it can lead improvement from within, as well as with support from outside.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector