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Kirstie Richards
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Joseph Catholic Primary School
Ramley Road
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SO41 8GY

Dear Mrs Richards

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady and St Joseph Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 October 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 ensure that the improvement plan, in a coherent way:

- states clearly for each area, practical steps and staff development to achieve the improvement which is required
- identifies who will lead actions and target dates for completion
- shows how governors will check and measure the school's progress
- refers to measurable improvement in pupils' achievement as the key indicator of success.

The governing body should take further action to secure advice from a national lead governor, to support the development of their work.

The local authority should take further action to:

- support the governing body to commission a local or national leader of education to work alongside the headteacher to provide external challenge and support
- ensure that all advisory visits by local authority staff are reported to governors in a timely way.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you to review action taken since the inspection. We toured the school together and visited all the classrooms. I looked briefly at some pupils' books. I examined a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans, information about pupils' targets and achievement, records of staff meetings and governors' meetings, and the report from the external review of governance.

Context

The deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term. The senior leadership team now comprises the headteacher with two established teachers in the roles of upper school leader (responsible for pupils' achievement in Year 3 to Year 6) and lower school leader (responsible for pupils' achievement in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2). A teacher recruited for the summer term to cover a temporary vacancy has now been employed permanently. Interviews for the class teacher vacancy created by the departure of the deputy headteacher are planned for later this week.

Main findings

The new leadership structure has generated immediate benefits for the school. Phase leaders are showing by example how you expect classrooms to be set up to support accelerated progress. As a result, consistency is evident around the school in fresh and dynamic classroom displays for mathematics and English. While supply teachers cover Class 4, the whole team has rallied round to make sure that this classroom develops in line with the others so that pupils here have the same support for their learning. This teamwork is a sure sign of the enthusiasm and energy shown by staff for the changes you are making.

You have ensured that the targets set for each pupil's progress this year in reading, writing and mathematics are suitably challenging. You now meet teachers at regular intervals to discuss the progress of their pupils. These meetings helpfully consider individual learning needs. However, the title "class chats" suggests too informal an approach and you do not use information from these meetings well enough to inform yourself and governors about whether achievement across the school is improving.

Your analysis of pupils' achievement in the last school year is accurate and helpful. However, you do not check closely enough, the progress made by different groups of pupils over time: girls and boys, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, pupils entitled to free school meals, pupils who speak English as an additional language, or the most able.

Valuable recent work to develop a clear scheme for progress in mathematics is helping teachers to set ambitious targets, and supporting pupils to know and explain their next steps. In English, teachers are working hard to develop the same clarity, especially for writing, and there is evidence of this beginning to make a difference too.

Teachers' marking and opportunities for pupils to respond are becoming more consistent, especially for older pupils. Teachers are making good use of new group sessions to discuss feedback with pupils. The records of leaders' conversations with pupils also show that pupils understand and appreciate their targets and that these motivate them to try harder.

You check the quality of teaching regularly, usefully observing lessons and examining teachers' planning and pupils' work. However, the feedback you provide to teachers focuses mainly on how they are teaching, without considering well enough pupils' progress towards their targets. Furthermore, observations and feedback do not refer closely enough to the priorities for improvement identified in the inspection report.

You provide valuable time for mathematics and English leaders to examine pupils' work and discuss this with them. Leaders' action plans include pertinent activities and outline clear aims to raise standards in their subjects. However, these activities are in the early stages of development and pupils' achievement does not feature strongly enough in these plans as the key measure of success. You have sensibly arranged for the English leader to work alongside a colleague from a local good school, and the mathematics leader is receiving a helpful structured programme of support from the local authority adviser.

You have made good use of staff meeting time to cover key themes including target setting, the moderation of assessment, checking classroom displays and agreeing "steps to success" for progress in mathematics. A recent staff training day about mathematics has clearly inspired teachers and had a significant effect in classrooms.

While you are clearly moving the school in the right direction, the three improvement planning documents need refining to ensure the progress is sustained. In particular, they need to make it easier for everyone to see what they should be doing, by when, and how the impact on pupils' achievement will be checked

The external review of governance has taken place, providing relevant advice about asking more probing questions, being more challenging to the headteacher and ensuring that monitoring activities focus on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. However, the report is too brief to provide meaningful direction to governors.

Sensibly, the governing body has reconstituted to a more efficient size. Governors are committed to see the school improve to be good as soon as possible. A small "school improvement team" has been established, specifically to check and promote the school's improvement. The first meeting of this group shows a clear focus on pupils' progress. However, records of the meeting show a lack of challenge or depth in questions asked of the headteacher and the responses provided.

External support

The local authority has provided helpful support and training to English and mathematics leaders. A senior adviser has worked with the headteacher to support improvement planning and target setting, but the outcome of this support has been variable, and reports of these activities have not been provided to governors in a timely way. Outline talks have been held with the headteacher about support from a local or national leader of education, but governors have not been involved in these discussions and arrangements have yet to be confirmed.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector