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Linda Brown
Interim headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Pius X RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 February 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. The school should take immediate action to:

- review teachers' planning in English and mathematics to make sure that activities challenge all pupils
- recruit and train middle leaders to take a greater and more effective role in leading their subjects and phases
- ensure all new teachers receive the support they need to develop their skills quickly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the interim headteacher, other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I undertook a focused tour of the school and looked at English and mathematics books. I scrutinised a range of school documentation which included: achievement information, minutes of governing body meetings, teachers' planning documents and records of the monitoring of teaching. I held discussions informally with pupils. I looked at the single central record to ensure appropriate checks have been made for all new staff.

Context

There have been significant changes in leadership and staffing since the inspection. In addition, the conversion to academy status planned to take place on 1 September 2014, was stopped four weeks ago. The current interim headteacher has been in post for four weeks. The deputy headteacher left the school at the end of last term. The anticipated academy sponsor appointed new staff for September 2014. Six out of the seven classes have new teachers. Of the six new class teachers, four are newly qualified teachers, one is a long-term temporary teacher and one an experienced teacher appointed as the mathematics leader.

Main findings

You are determined to bring about the urgent changes needed to improve the school quickly. Your governors and new teachers share your resolve to do the best for the pupils. Since the inspection, time spent by leaders on the proposed academy conversion, in tackling turbulence in staffing and in attempting to appoint a permanent headteacher, have all hindered the impact of planned improvements. Rightly, you are focusing on improving the quality of teaching to raise standards. You have observed every class and are providing honest and helpful advice to teachers, particularly to those new to the profession. You have ensured appropriate arrangements are in place to support and monitor newly qualified teachers. However, much work remains to be done to ensure the quality of teaching is consistently good across the school. The lack of leadership in Early Years Foundation Stage and in English is limiting the current capacity to bring about improvement.

The school action plan links directly to the areas for development identified in the inspection report. You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are providing high quality staff training to develop teachers' and teaching assistants' skills. You are involving the newly appointed leader of mathematics and other leaders in drawing up these plans for improvement. This is helping them to develop the necessary skills to lead their subjects. Where

weaknesses have been identified, leaders have drawn up action plans to improve their subjects quickly. For example, they have put additional resources into place to improve the teaching of mathematics. This has begun to bring improvements. However, although the progress pupils are making is speeding up, not enough pupils reach the standards they are capable of, particularly the most able.

You have begun to tackle the inconsistencies in teachers' planning in English and mathematics. Some plans demonstrate a clear focus on activities to challenge pupils of different abilities. However, others do not focus clearly enough on how they will help pupils to make better progress. This means some activities are too easy for some and too hard for others and they make slower progress than they should. Teachers' marking is too variable in quality. On occasions, younger pupils cannot read the guidance given to them. However, where practice is effective, pupils use teachers' comments to enable them to learn at a faster rate.

You have rightly focused on tackling occasional poor behaviour in lessons. This is helping raise teachers' and pupils' expectations for good behaviour. As a result, behaviour has improved and pupils are better able to concentrate on their learning.

Following the inspection, governors entered into an academy conversion process, strongly believing that this would benefit the pupils at St Pius X. Despite the decision by the sponsor to withdraw, governors have wasted no time in securing the right leadership for the school. Governors have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have strengthened the governing body this term and now have the right skills to both challenge and support the school to improve.

Ofsted will 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 is providing strong support to you and your staff. They have worked with the governing body to provide interim leadership for the school through a period of significant turbulence. They are currently supporting you effectively by arranging support for each teacher and for you from a local school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Bristol and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector