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Mrs Sue McMahon
Acting Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Bristol Road
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Dear Mrs McMahon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, other staff members, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors and a representative of the local authority. The inspector also met with a group of pupils.

Context

Earlier in the autumn term, the school's community was affected by the tragic death of a member of staff. In addition, the school's substantive headteacher has been absent for some time. In her absence, the deputy headteacher has taken on the role of acting headteacher.

A new business manager has been appointed ready to join the school in January 2015. At the start of this school year, a new local authority school adviser was assigned to work with the school.

Main findings

This school is making steady progress expected, as it tackles the areas for improvement identified during the recent inspection. The increased focus on improving the teaching of mathematics is proving successful. Pupils are now being taught mathematical concepts by following a structured and carefully considered programme. The positive impact of this work can be seen in the school's improving mathematics results.

Last year, pupils performed well in the Year 1 phonics check. Results for the last two years were above those achieved by pupils nationally. Although three quarters of the boys reached the standard expected nationally, almost all the girls reached this level. Half of the pupils identified as having special educational needs also reached the nationally expected standard.

The school's 2014 Key Stage 1 assessments show that Year 2 pupils' attainment increased from the previous year. The school's Year 2 reading and mathematics results are now higher than the national average and pupils' attainment in writing is significantly above average. The writing results are particularly impressive with more pupils than last year reaching the higher levels. As with the Year 1 phonics assessments, Year 2 girls out-performed the boys in all subjects. Pupils with special educational needs performed well. Disadvantaged pupils did particularly well in all subjects and were among the highest performing pupils of their year.

It is pleasing to report that the 2014 Key Stage 2 mathematics results improved over the previous year's figure. Although the results for reading, and English grammar, punctuation and spelling were all just above the national average, they were slightly lower than the 2013 results. Boys' mathematics results were better than the girls' results, but girls were ahead of boys in reading, writing and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Disadvantaged pupils' results show that their attainment overall is around a year and a half behind other pupils at the school. Year 6 pupils with special educational needs performed well. Overall, almost all pupils made the progress expected nationally, with a few making better than nationally expected progress.

The school is focusing strongly on improving the quality of teaching. Initiatives to increase pupils' progress in mathematics are proving successful. The mathematics policy has been supplemented with a detailed annex that explains the calculation methods being used in school. The policy has been well received by staff and parents, as it explains clearly how the school teaches these key skills and shows how they develop across the different year groups. The increased focus on providing

extra challenge for the more able mathematicians is also helping to ensure that all pupils work to achieve their potential.

Pupils enjoy school and speak positively about learning, particularly when studying mathematics. The school's use of an internet-based software programme is working well as it allows pupils to practise their mathematical skills at home, which they enjoy.

Working with the local authority, the senior leaders have gained a good understanding about the quality of teaching at the school. They are clear about teachers' strengths and can articulate those areas that still need further improvement. The recently introduced marking policy provides teachers with clear guidelines about how they are expected to respond to pupils' work. The school is monitoring the policy's implementation to ensure that staff respond consistently to pupils' work.

The school has benefited from the local authority's guidance to strengthen the school's leadership skills. The acting headteacher is providing clear and capable leadership. She is supported well and gaining valuable experience from established colleagues working in other local schools. The two teachers who have senior leadership responsibility are also being supported well by local authority advisers. As a result, these senior teachers are building their ability to lead their respective subjects. The teacher with responsibility for leading English recognises pupils' that achievement is not yet high enough.

Importantly, the school's staff are pulling together and focusing on improving the quality of education being provided. Morale at the school is good and there is a strong sense of purpose that recognises that many of the school's actions are showing signs of success.

The school's governing body is growing in confidence and taking greater responsibility for monitoring the impact of the school's improvement initiatives. Governors have been assigned responsibility for monitoring specific subjects, which is helping them to assess the impact of the school's work. As part of their responsibilities, governors visit the school regularly to work with the senior leaders. As a result, governors are gaining first-hand knowledge of how well pupils are learning. Governors are complimentary about the level of detail that they are receiving from the acting headteacher and other senior leaders. The acting headteacher's reports are comprehensive and provide governors with relevant information about the school's performance. The governing body minutes are also very detailed and show that they are being robust in holding the school to account.

As part of their responsibility, the governors are reviewing the school's future leadership team, to sustain and build on the improvements currently being made. ensure that the school is well placed when it is re-inspected.

External support

The external support provided by the local authority has focused appropriately on strengthening the school's current leadership team. The local authority has arranged for the school to receive advice and guidance from experienced colleagues, which has helped the senior leaders to develop their leadership skills.

The local authority is monitoring the school's progress by conducting regular reviews. These reviews provide a detailed insight into the school's strengths and areas that need further improvement. The school uses the findings to inform their future improvement plans, so as to strengthen the quality of education being provided.

The school has also engaged the local authority to initiate a coaching programme for teachers, which is designed to help teachers reflect on their teaching practice. As the programme is still in its very early days, it is not yet possible to judge its effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton

Her Majesty's Inspector