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5 December 2014

Mrs Catherine McHale
Head of Academy
Saint Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy
Wellington Street
Grimsby
Lincolnshire
DN32 7JX

Dear Mrs McHale

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Saint Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 4 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in April 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Strategic Director for People for North East Lincolnshire and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014

Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better, so that pupils make at least good progress in mathematics and in writing, particularly in Years 3 and 4, and reach the standards they are capable of by the end of Year 6 by:

- raising expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve and by planning activities that consistently challenge them, particularly in mathematics
- ensuring a consistent whole-academy approach to developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills and providing pupils with more opportunities to write at length

- improving the quality of marking so pupils know what they have to do to make their work better and then act quickly upon that advice

- making sure that activities are interesting enough to capture and hold pupils' attention in their work, so that their attitudes to learning and behaviour are always good, particularly the boys in Year 4

- planning activities that enable pupils who are supported by the pupil premium to make good progress, especially in writing and mathematics.

- Further improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - eradicating the very small remnant of inadequate teaching in lower Key Stage 2, particularly in writing
 - developing the role of middle leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of achievement in their subjects by using data more effectively, so that they have a good understanding of how well pupils achieve and how well they are taught, in their areas of responsibility
 - working with parents to ensure recent improvements in pupils' attendance and punctuality continue, so that attendance is good, pupils are rarely late for academy and learning time is not missed
 - making sure the governing body develop robust procedures for checking the effectiveness of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 December 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the head of the academy, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body. Telephone discussions were held with two representatives of the academy sponsor. Documents provided by the academy were evaluated. Seven parts of Key Stage 2 lessons were observed during the inspection. All of these observations were carried out jointly with academy leaders, who also joined a learning walk in the early years and Key Stage 1. The lesson observations focused on the quality of teaching and learning, especially related to the areas for improvement, and the impact of new academy policies in the classroom.

Context

Eight new teachers started in September 2014, one of whom is a new assistant headteacher and four are newly qualified teachers. Five new teaching assistants and an attendance officer have taken up post during the autumn term 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The executive headteacher and the head of academy have a very clear vision which is driving the improvements in the academy. They share their aspiration and high expectations with pupils and staff. The impact of their leadership is recognised by staff who say leaders are, 'supportive, effective, driven and approachable'. Staff also say, 'it is good to come to the academy' and the academy is a 'happy place'.

Middle leadership is improving. The middle leaders are highly enthusiastic about their roles and the support they have had for their own professional development. An external consultant has been employed by the academy to develop the middle leaders. They have been trained to monitor the quality of teaching, carry out scrutiny of pupils' work, recognise good progress in pupils' books and to provide feedback to teachers. They were involved in writing the academy development plan. As a result, they have greater confidence in monitoring and evaluating achievement in their areas.

The majority of teachers were new to the academy in September 2014. The middle leaders are providing effective induction for the newly qualified teachers. Detailed monitoring through lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work means leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. Support and challenge are provided for teachers whose practice is not yet good, but the quality of teaching is still variable.

Marking and feedback have improved. Teachers consistently mark work and most provide feedback which helps pupils understand their next steps. Some teachers use

'fix-it' time very effectively so pupils have time to respond to feedback and improve their work. However, this is not consistent in all classes.

There has been a whole-academy approach to providing pupils with more opportunities to write at length. A review of books during the inspection shows that there is much better progress in writing in the majority of classes. The academy has yet to develop a consistent approach to developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, although training for staff is planned in January. Better testing and organisation of phonics (the sounds that letters make) groups are starting to have an impact on pupils' progress. The developing curriculum in mathematics is improving the consistency of teaching and learning of mathematics across the academy.

Behaviour for learning has improved significantly. Staff are using the new behaviour policy consistently and no poor behaviour was seen during this inspection. Boys whose behaviour has previously been a concern were seen concentrating on and enjoying their work. Behaviour logs support this observation, with a reduction in the number of incidents. A small group of boys are working separately with a teacher in the mornings and this has considerably improved their engagement with literacy and numeracy. A family worker is having a positive impact on the behaviour of some pupils. Work to the building and a much improved learning environment are also encouraging good attitudes to learning.

A newly appointed attendance officer is working well with families and, as a result, attendance and punctuality have improved. The academy has a range of activities to involve families in academy life, including coffee mornings, welcome meetings and better communication. These have led to greater attendance at parents' evenings and very positive responses about the academy in a recent questionnaire.

Assessment processes are more rigorous. Leaders are working with other academies to develop assessment processes and to moderate teachers' judgements. Progress data collected about each pupil are being carefully analysed and the assistant headteacher is meeting all teachers to review their data and identify which pupils need extra help. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is monitored closely and the academy has planned activities to help them to catch up with their peers, including extra literacy and mathematics lessons. The academy expects the impact of the extra help and improved monitoring of pupil progress to be seen in the data collected at the end of the autumn term 2014.

Pupil grouping at Key Stage 2 in literacy and numeracy by the stage they have reached in their learning, rather than their age, provides opportunities to push the most able pupils, as well as support those who need extra help. In the governors' recent review of this approach to grouping, pupils said they liked these groups because they could work at their own pace and all had opportunities to excel in their group. Teachers also said they valued the process. The additional challenge for the

most able was very evident in the literacy lesson observed and in their books and is beginning to develop in mathematics.

The reviews of governance and the academy's use of pupil premium (additional government funding) have been completed. The governors have an action plan and are taking a more rigorous role in monitoring the actions taken to address the areas for improvement. Governors and sponsors form part of a monitoring group which holds leaders to account for academy improvement. There is a governor with responsibility for monitoring the impact of pupil premium spending who has an improving understanding of how the money is used to have an impact on pupil progress. Each part of the academy development plan is monitored by a separate governor who is required to ask questions of senior leaders about the impact of the actions taken to address the areas for improvement and feed back their findings at governing body meetings. Governors are beginning to use visits to the academy to collect evidence, resulting in a better understanding of the actions being taken to improve the academy.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Highly effective leadership from the executive headteacher and the head of academy.
- The enthusiasm shown for improvement and the vitality shared by the whole staff team.
- The rapidly developing leadership skills of the assistant headteacher and the middle leaders.
- Improvements in the quantity and quality of pupils' writing.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of spelling in pupils' work.

External support

The academy leaders make good use of external support, including opportunities to work with other academies. Representatives of the sponsor and the diocese make regular visits to review and report on the work of the academy. Their reports provide a useful record of what is improving and what still needs to be done. They have contributed to the professional development of the literacy and numeracy coordinators. An independent consultant is training middle leaders and this is having a positive impact on their leadership.