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Miss Moira Kenneway
Headteacher
St Aidan's Catholic Primary School
Adswood Road
Huyton
Liverpool
Merseyside
L36 7XR

Dear Miss Kenneway

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2015, 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 October 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 as below:

- school leaders to revise the action plan so that wording matches exactly areas for improvement on page 3 of the inspection report
- the co-ordinator for English to ensure that pupils get more opportunities to plan, draft and edit longer pieces of written work as they get older
- All teachers to correct basic spelling and punctuation in children's work, and give written feedback in child-friendly language
- teaching assistants to allow children to write more of their own work.
- senior leaders to visit a school where development of children's early speaking and listening skills is excellent

- governors to contact the local network of schools, to seek guidance on how they can produce their own written monitoring calendar, including a wider range of evidence than the headteacher's reports
- the chair of governors to ensure that a governor with oversight of special educational needs provision is in place, and arrange oversight of English and mathematics
- the headteacher to add policies for English and mathematics to the school's website.

Evidence

During the inspection, I toured the school with you then met you and the deputy headteacher, five members of the Governing Body, and representatives of the local authority and the diocese to discuss progress since the inspection last term. I evaluated the school post-inspection action plan and looked at related documents provided by the school including recent results and assessments across the age-range. I met five teachers to talk about recent changes and their impact on learning and teaching. Jointly with you and the deputy headteacher, I scrutinised samples of children's writing in Key Stages 1 and 2, and talked with children about their work.

Context

The school has a new co-ordinator for mathematics, after a gap of one term.

Main findings

You and the staff are tackling improvement with enthusiasm, as a team. The action plan makes good use of information about pupils' performance from entering the school to leaving it. The needs of groups and individuals have been identified well. You put in place a collaborative approach to forming the plan. This has ensured all staff are well-informed about what needs to be done and the progress made.

As teachers said: 'There has been a big change here.' Learning and teaching are monitored more closely but this structure has given teachers 'both confidence and support'. Coaching is in place for each teacher, on particular teaching points they would like to improve. Support is available for teaching assistants too. Teachers are enthusiastic about staff meetings, which focus on learning and practical resources. These regular meetings have contributed a great deal to improvement in English.

Each half term, every teacher has a progress meeting where pupils' learning is examined with senior staff. This is a common approach in schools but a strong feature at St Aidan's is that teachers prepare the data and reports themselves, so they are well-informed about pupils and groups. Teachers use all of the half term's work to comment on progress, not just a one-off test.

While responding to inspection, the school continues to move forward on other changes for all schools, in particular the National Curriculum. A subject with major changes is primary mathematics. Governors should assure themselves that changes to teaching and learning in mathematics are being made, such as by appointing a governor with oversight and requesting updates.

The post-inspection plan is driving action to improve spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary and the range of written work that pupils do. The plan was formed with wide involvement and many people chipping in, which meant that the wording of actions sometimes differs from improvements in the inspection report. It is important that the wording reflects the report so that governors can oversee progress.

Children are proud of their work, shown in good presentation of in English, history and geography and in some science books. Younger pupils showed progress in the sentences they could form and in the vocabulary they use. They write poems, stories and factual work. Older pupils are starting to write well in different styles, such as in play scripts written by Year 4. There was some exciting scene-setting in a play script about a football match. However, too much work is written out for lower achieving pupils rather than letting them try for themselves, with supporting frameworks. Techniques for drafting are not well-related to the demands of writing longer pieces. There were not many examples of re-drafting and editing in older pupils' work.

Spelling and punctuation showed improvement and were generally sound in the books that I saw. However, many pupils made repeated errors personal to them, such as capital letters mid-sentence or simple words misspelled. These errors were not always corrected so that children can get out of these habits. Often, more complicated words and punctuation were used correctly by the same pupils.

Governors are supportive of staff and helped to raise morale after the inspection judgement, which came as a surprise. Recently, some governors have made their own visits to see teacher, pupils, or written work. However, governors do not have a clear view about the kind of evidence they should have to hold the school to account. They rely too much on the headteacher's report to monitor progress. The governor with oversight of special needs has left. A replacement should be appointed rapidly as this role is required of governing bodies.

Ofsted may 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 adviser has visited regularly since the inspection to support and challenge action planning. Impact can be seen in the way that data are used effectively to inform the plan. More could be done to put governors in contact with others who have improved rapidly after a judgement of requires improvement. The

Diocese has ensured that vacancies on the governing body have been filled, useful in bringing in extra expertise. Pastoral visits were also provided for staff.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley and as below.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – Knowsley
- Diocese - Liverpool