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23 January 2015

Spencer Bragg
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Scratton Road
Stanford-le-Hope
SS17 0PA

Dear Mr Bragg

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

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 ensure that:

- leaders have high expectations of all staff and use their formal and informal monitoring procedures to identify and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in all subjects
- all teachers have higher expectations of the quality of pupils' writing, including the presentation of their work

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, three members of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons with you and we talked pupils and looked at their books.

Main findings

You and other leaders have recently begun to tackle weaker teaching through more regular monitoring of lessons, work scrutinies and better tracking of pupils' progress. However, too much time has been lost in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Some teachers now have individual support plans, which include sharper targets for improvement, but there is more that needs to be done to improve teaching so that it becomes good. You are not using all of the opportunities you have to ensure that staff meet your higher expectations. You do not use your regular informal visits to lessons to identify areas for development and good practice. You and other leaders do not have enough information about the quality of teaching and learning in subjects other than mathematics and English. This is because the wider curriculum is not yet scrutinised regularly.

Leaders have reviewed the school's development plans, which are sharply focused on what needs to improve. Most subjects are now taught within a theme and the aim here is to give pupils a real context for their learning. Pupils say they enjoy learning in this way. However, it is not yet clear that this approach is improving the quality of pupils' work. Teachers' expectations are sometimes too low. For instance, the quantity and quality of writing in pupils' books is not consistently good. The presentation of work and pupils' handwriting varies too much. Efforts to improve teachers' feedback to pupils have been successful in part, but not in all year groups or in all subjects. You have focused on improving teachers' marking but it is taking too long for all teachers to consistently follow the school's marking policy.

There are some encouraging signs that leadership is improving. For instance, the leader of mathematics has a clear view of what needs to develop and is providing useful training for teachers. The leader for the provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also having an impact. The effectiveness of small group support for some pupils with special educational needs is now evaluated for its impact on improving pupils' progress. If this support is not effective, new solutions are sought.

Governors are becoming more rigorous in the way they check the school's progress. They visit the school more frequently to see teaching and learning first-hand and to talk to leaders about their impact. Governors now receive more useful information about pupils' progress in the data you provide. They ask challenging questions about the school's work and are beginning to be specific about the information they want you to provide for their meetings. Sometimes, however, governors' processes are too slow, for instance, the planned review of governance has taken too long to arrange and has been delayed unnecessarily.

External support

The local authority is providing a high level of appropriate support to you and other members of staff. You have built a productive relationship with the local authority representative who has recently begun working with the school. He now visits the school regularly to support you and other leaders. Notes of visit are sharply focused on what is going well and what needs to improve. The local authority has supported you in giving clear messages to governors about how successfully the school is addressing the areas for improvement. Local authority officers agree that there is much work still to do and valuable time has been lost since the section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex and the Director of Education for Brentwood Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector