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Mrs R Turner
Executive Headteacher
St Thomas a Becket Catholic Infant School
Tutts Barn Lane
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Dear Mrs Turner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Thomas a Becket Catholic Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 6 February 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 to:

- develop a policy statement for the teaching and learning in Year 1, to provide clear internal guidance about how early years and national curriculum assessments and objectives should dovetail together
- ensure that minutes of governing body meetings show clearly the questions asked of senior staff by governors and how these questions have been resolved
- ensure that curriculum leaders for all subjects have sufficient time, and are developing the necessary expertise, to lead and improve their subjects further.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assessment leader. I held discussions with governors, a representative of the local authority and the Year 1 teachers. We toured the school together visiting all classes at work and looked at examples of pupils' work. I evaluated documentation, including improvement and action plans, minutes of meetings and data showing pupils' academic progress.

Main findings

This was a positive and encouraging visit. It is clear that you, the staff and governors have accepted the findings of the inspection readily, albeit that these were disappointing in some ways. You have begun to work very effectively to deal with the matters requiring improvement. To some extent, this has all been a matter of timing. You are new to the infant school and to the role of executive headteacher across both the infant and junior schools. Your senior staff are also fairly new in their leadership positions. There has not yet been much time for you to learn about the infant school's needs and for the initiatives you are subsequently pursuing to embed. However, since the inspection, there has been some very positive progress.

It is good to note, for example, the recent improvements in guided reading, phonics teaching (including more sophisticated pupil grouping) and marking of pupils' work. We saw some positive examples of pupils making improvement as a result of teachers' marking comments.

Since the inspection, you have introduced new and apt objectives for the teachers in the Year 1 classes to work towards. These have helped these staff, who are working hard and enthusiastically, to become more consistent in their approaches. We discussed that it would be valuable for the school to write a specific policy statement about how it organises Year 1, and the philosophy behind this. Such a policy should help to clarify, with appropriate timescales, how the pupils' good learning from Reception is taken forward in Year 1, and how their well-developed independence, for example, is used and developed in Year 1. This policy should show how the assessments and curricula from early years and Year 1 dovetail together.

Your current assessment data indicates that pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is improving, especially where specific development work has been done. Pupils' attainment continues to be generally above average but you believe, rightly, that more is still possible. You have evidence that the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is improving. The small number of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding perform slightly less well than their peers. Although this gap is not very wide, you are right to continue to pay attention to it, through intelligent bespoke provision for each pupil.

Senior and middle leadership are developing well. It is good to see how senior staff share responsibilities and are knowledgeable and clear about their respective roles. Staff are being held to account for their work more rigorously. Performance management for staff is appropriately organised and you were able to show useful evidence of how your observations of lessons help staff to improve their practice further.

All subjects have leaders. It was good to see that each of these leaders has carried out useful planning and evaluation for their subjects. However, some of these documents are more sophisticated than others. It will be useful now to ensure that this promising work is developed so that all subjects are led to the same high standard. This work could be usefully developed by building further on the joint work of staff from the infant and junior schools.

When we visited classes at work, we saw the same positive attitudes shown by pupils to their learning noted in the October inspection. Pupils engaged well with what appeared to be interesting and well-focused, challenging teaching. In Reception and Year 1, there is an attractive and stimulating learning environment, with interesting displays and readily available resources. The Year 2 classes are in hatted classrooms. We agreed that these classes were not quite as stimulating as those for the younger pupils.

The governing body, which oversees both infant and junior schools, is suitably organised. Governors are paying correct attention to the most important strategic areas and are keen to improve and develop their work. Their visits to the school are suitably linked to the school improvement plan. However, the minutes of their meetings do not show clearly that they are asking challenging questions of senior staff. Nor do these minutes indicate clearly enough that governors are addressing issues specifically concerning the infant school. Both of these matters should be addressed so that the governing body can make more impact on improvement.

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 has had more direct involvement in the school since the inspection. You have welcomed this, finding that the support provided has been both challenging and realistic. Local authority consultants have helpfully supported some improvements in teaching. The local authority should continue to support the governing body in its development. It is good to note too the school's ongoing strong relationship with the local authority music service.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector