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Mr Ian Walker
Headteacher
St Gerard's RC Primary School
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Middlesbrough
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gerard's RC Primary School, Middlesbrough

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2015, with Suzanne Lithgow, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- Strengthen the success criteria and milestone targets in school plans to show the intended impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- Ensure that leaders' checks on the quality of the school's work take place more frequently and are finely focused to identify the difference that actions are making to pupils' learning and inform the next steps for improvement.
- Establish systems for accurately assessing and reporting pupils' progress and use the outcomes of assessment to communicate clearly to staff and governors the strengths and aspects that require improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders, teachers, the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the diocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plans were evaluated. Visits were made to lessons in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes to observe the impact of the school's work. Informal discussions were held with pupils. Documents were scrutinised including school planning, the outcomes of monitoring activities and reports to governors about the progress and attainment of groups of pupils.

Main findings

The school has made slow progress to tackle the areas for improvement in the three months since the school was inspected. Senior leaders are not driving improvement with the verve and commitment required to accelerate the pace. Plans include a range of actions focused on developing teaching, leadership and refining school systems. However, the timescales and success measures are mainly focused on completing tasks and make little reference to the difference they are expected to make to pupils' learning and other outcomes. Not all teachers who need support receive it. The headteacher has undertaken a small amount of lesson observation with the support of the local authority adviser. However, very little of the planned programme of monitoring of teaching and learning has taken place and considerable slippage is already evident. Consequently, senior leaders and governors do not have sufficient information to rigorously evaluate the impact that their plans to secure good teaching. Reports to governors make scant reference to the learning for specific groups of pupils.

Subject leaders for reading and writing are enthusiastic and are beginning to put their plans into place. For example, a phonics policy has been written, but not shared fully, and plans show an intention to develop speech and language skills in the Reception class. Leaders are keen for pupils in all classes to be taught a range of strategies to help them quickly acquire the skills to read independently. Some training for teachers to develop their knowledge of how to teach reading is taking place. However, this has not led to changes in practice across the school. Leadership is not sufficiently developed at senior level and throughout the school to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance in reading, writing and mathematics. In this respect, subject leaders are not directed or guided closely enough by the headteacher to ensure that rapid progress is made.

More frequent assessment is taking place but the increasing information and data is not always analysed or understood well enough by the headteacher and senior leaders. Essential information about pupils' progress is not reported clearly or as fully as it should be and governors do not have a clear picture of achievement in all year groups.

Options following the recent external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding are being considered by the headteacher and governors. So far, no firm decisions or plans have been made regarding how to set about the task of closing the gaps in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.

Weaknesses in the school plan and in the headteacher's leadership of monitoring and analysis of school data mean governors are not kept sufficiently informed about the school's work. Governors have not held leaders firmly to account for these omissions.

Her Majesty's Inspector has serious concerns about the sufficiency of the actions being taken by the school. Ofsted will return to the school in the summer term to carry out a further monitoring visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to review the impact of the revised action plan and ensure that appropriate procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are in place.

External support

External support commissioned by the school prior to the Section 5 inspection has continued. Together with some support provided by local authority officers it is helping to develop subject and senior leaders' confidence and understanding of how to carry out aspects of their roles. However, this does not amount to a planned programme of support and development for all staff that need it. The local authority has not kept a close enough eye on the progress the school is making and together with the Diocese and governors recognise and are putting in place additional support. The purpose and intended impact of further support was not available at the time of this visit. The progress of this action will be reviewed at the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing , the Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough and the Director of Children's Services for Middlesbrough.

Yours sincerely

Gina White

Her Majesty's Inspector