

10 March 2015

Mrs Heather McGowan  
Headteacher  
St Antony's RC Primary School  
Shadsworth Road  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB1 2HP

Dear Mrs McGowan

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Antony's RC Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen**

Following my visit to your school on 9 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the 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 April 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:

- as a priority, improve teaching and learning across the school, especially in reading writing and mathematics ensuring that any initiatives are firmly embedded
- develop leadership capacity of subject leads to support improvement in teachers' subject knowledge and their confidence and ability to provide stimulating lessons which will engage learners
- make a concerted effort to improve attendance.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, two members of the Core Group as well as groups of pupils from Years 3 and 6. A meeting was also held with your local authority school improvement officer to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring visit in September and the level of support currently being provided. In addition, two learning walks with you focussed on the overall quality of teaching and learning.

## **Context**

The headteacher retired in December 2014 and you took over as the substantive headteacher having previously held the post of deputy in the school. Three newly qualified teachers are providing cover for two classes where teachers are temporarily absent. From January a teacher has been seconded part-time to fulfil the deputy headteacher role in the school as temporary cover until a new appointment can be made. Some restructuring of staffing has taken place with subject responsibilities being re-allocated. There have been some significant changes to the role of the governing body with a small Core Group being formed to oversee, monitor and drive forward the school's post inspection improvement work. This includes a small group of appropriately qualified and skilled governors as well as representatives from the diocese and the local authority.

## **Main findings**

Although improving, the achievement of pupils continues to be a concern. There has been some improvement in reading, which is a focus of current development, but the pace of pupils' progress continues to be inconsistent across the school. Standards remain below national levels with disadvantaged pupils making less progress than their peers. Although reading has improved in the current Year 6, standards in writing and mathematics remain low. There is also a heavy reliance on booster classes in an attempt to address a legacy of under-performance in previous years.

The post-inspection action plan is currently being reviewed and a short-term plan is being produced to focus on a few manageable improvements which are intended to be in place and impacting by the end of the summer term. These are intended to boost staff morale and confidence.

The school has suffered from a legacy of complacency and you are beginning to change the culture of the school into one that is more dynamic and academically focused. You have ensured that a range of management structures such as performance management, which were missing previously, are now in place. Monitoring procedures which were notably absent are now being established as part of everyday practice. A range of whole school policies are also being implemented in an attempt to ensure consistency across the school. These include a calculation, reading and marking policy. However, these are not yet being implemented consistently across the school and are not yet embedded as part of everyday practice. For example, pupils have regular access to dictionaries and thesauruses but these are not being used by them as part of everyday common-place routine. Also, funding to improve provision in sport and to support disadvantaged pupils has not been well targeted in the past. Attendance is also currently an issue with attendance being well below the national average across all classes.

During our learning walks in the morning and mid-afternoon we noted the inconsistency with which subjects were being delivered across the curriculum. Currently, the curriculum is fragmented and unbalanced and is not being delivered with much conviction. In some classes pupils do not study some subjects on a regular basis and experience a narrow curriculum. As a result, it is very difficult to untangle what is being taught and to what depth. Teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics is often superficial. For example, in science in some classes experiments are used to develop some understanding of scientific concepts in other classes pupils have few opportunities to pursue scientific enquiry. Although the school has joined a number of subject associations for advice and support it is clearly evident that teachers are not using these resources with any conviction or regularity. Currently, teachers' subject knowledge to teach across a full range of subjects is weak. Middle leadership has been restructured with some redistribution of responsibilities. However, subject leaders are currently having very limited impact as much of their work is in its infancy.

Pupils are aware of the changes and improvements you are trying to implement. They felt that certain aspects of school life are changing for the better. They have noted the increased rigour and focus with which reading is being delivered. 'We now read every day' was a comment made by one pupil. Pupils interviewed were generally positive about the school. They have noted that behaviour is improving linked to the recently implemented behaviour policy. One or two lessons are still interrupted by 'silly' behaviour but this is now less frequent. Incidents of bullying are infrequent. They did feel that the lack of organised activities and resources at lunchtime can lead to poorer behaviour. They also mentioned that they are getting more feedback from teachers regarding their work, although this again varies from class to class and subject to subject. They are positive about the fact that they felt that adults, especially schools leaders, are more approachable now. One Year 6 pupil quoted that 'you listened to their problems and sort them out'. This is further evidence to show that the culture of the school is slowly changing for the better.

There is a more concerted effort by the school to engage with parents and involve them more with supporting their children's learning and development. Reading workshops for parents have been well attended and the Christmas fair was an unprecedented success. Slowly a sense of community is returning to the school.

The Core Group, including governors, meets on a fortnightly basis and now provides greater challenge to senior leaders in the school than had previously been the case. There is also a clear determination to resolve staffing issues and challenge underperformance. The school now has a clearer sense of direction linked to a real desire to make a difference to the lives of the pupils in its care. There is a realistic view of the school and a realisation that it will take some time to overturn the legacy of several years of underachievement. Small changes have been made but there is still much to do with many of the recent changes not fully embedded and, as yet, not having sufficient impact. There is also a clear understanding that improvement now needs to be accelerated over the rest of the school year.

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 and the diocese have been aware and concerned about the low standards of the school. Support offered is now being accepted. The diocese is currently funding a Specialist Leader in Education to support the school improve teaching and learning. Links are being established with nearby schools to share effective practice. The school is now receiving more regular monitoring visits and support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese of Salford and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

**Her Majesty's Inspector**