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29 April 2015

Mrs Michelle Ravey
Headteacher
Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School
Brunswick Street
Parr
St Helens
Merseyside
WA9 2JE

Dear Mrs Ravey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School, St. Helens

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 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 December 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:

- ensure that information on the school's website is fully up to date and contains detailed information for parents about what children learn in each year group.
- ensure that more able learners are accurately identified and their progress is tracked as a discrete group.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your assistant headteacher, five members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and one from the Archdiocese, a group of subject leaders and a group of eight Year 5 pupils. The focus of the meetings was to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

In addition, you accompanied me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to each class. The school improvement plan was evaluated and I looked at a range of documentation including records of meetings of the Governing Body, records of staff professional training and monitoring of teaching and learning, senior leaders' analysis of pupils' current progress and external reviews by the local authority. I looked at a sample of work from pupils in Years 2, 5 and 6.

Context

Since the inspection, the new early years leader has taken up post and teaches in the reception class. The current assistant headteacher has been appointed to take up the post of deputy headteacher from September 2015. The seconded deputy headteacher left the school in January. The school business manager and the reception class teacher are currently not in school. The Chair of the Governing Body has very recently taken the decision to relinquish her post and this post is vacant.

Main findings

Since the inspection, it is clear that you and your senior leaders have continued to move developments forward swiftly, with determination and with unswerving positivity. There is a strong sense of shared leadership and collective responsibility for improvement. The school improvement plan was amended in the light of the areas for improvement in the inspection report and includes concrete actions linked to these areas.

Significant amounts of staff training have taken place and more is planned to tackle key aspects of teaching practice such as coaching focussing on tailoring work to meet the needs of all pupils. The local authority mathematics consultant has led two training sessions to explore the key skills in teaching problem-solving so that teachers are more confident and competent in using this approach to support learning. Links to the St Helens Teaching Alliance and a visit to an outstanding school are helping teachers to strengthen their subject knowledge and to share good practice. In addition, an in-school coaching programme focussing on mathematics is allowing staff to work together to share and develop their classroom practice. You consider training to be impacting positively in the classroom; you shared with me an example of seeing the aspects of 'conjecture' and 'estimation' being used in mathematics lessons when you conducted a learning walk following training. Middle and senior leaders comment that there is now greater openness and confidence among staff. Working together is more common place and they share ideas about strategies that work best in the classroom.

Middle leaders are becoming more confident in their roles. They check teaching and learning in their subject areas through work sampling and provide helpful feedback to teachers. The work sample conducted shows improvements in some areas in feedback given to pupils to help them to improve their work. This is however still at a developmental stage and there is more to be done to ensure that feedback is

consistent in all classes and in all subjects so that pupils know exactly how to improve.

Processes to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching have been strengthened and now include learning walks, work sampling, analysis of pupils' progress and formal assessment data. These actions are being used to target improvement and to drive improvements in teaching and learning in the classroom.

Current achievement data and predictions for the Key Stage 2 pupils are positive and show improvement. Data highlight however that there is a continuing concern with Key Stage 1 progress. You and your senior leaders are acutely aware of this issue and are appropriately directing resources to support learning in this Key Stage. You acknowledge also that there is more work to be done around the identification and tracking of more able learners and the data analysis does not currently track this group of pupils as a discrete group.

The new lead for the early years has brought about some significant changes in a short period of time. From the point of her arrival in school, she has re-evaluated the assessments of children so that they reflect accurately what children know and can do when they start at the school. She has made changes to the learning areas to create a more stimulating learning environment and has changed the daily timetable to ensure that time is appropriately used to help children to learn. These developments are accompanied by a new system for capturing children's progress and review meetings to ensure that teaching focuses on tackling the learning needs of all groups of children.

Pupils are extremely positive about their school and are proud of their work. A group of Year 5 pupils expressed the view that they now feel challenged in their work and that they feel that their school has improved 'loads'. The school is now a vibrant celebration of learning with stimulating displays evident which demonstrate a range of approaches taken to learning. Pupils commented that they appreciate the opportunities to learn in different ways and that they are now finding learning fun. They also value the occasions when their family members are invited into school to share in the 'wow' events and comment that this helps them to 'share the experience' of learning.

Members of the governing body say that the findings of the inspection have made them 'hungry for progress'. They are supportive of school leaders and demonstrate a clear understanding of the improvements made and where there is still further work to do. Governors feel that as a result of the improved information that they receive, they have a better understanding of the work of the school and are in a stronger position to offer support and challenge. Governors are very conscious of the need to swiftly appoint a replacement for the Chair of Governors and are being well supported in this.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

It is clear that you value the support provided by the local authority and the Archdiocese who have a clear understanding of the needs of the school. The local authority has been instrumental in providing consultant support as well as organising links with another school and conducting in-school reviews to bring about improvement. The support is having a positive effect on the school's progress. Both the local authority and the Archdiocese are providing essential assistance in terms of staff appointments and in finding a replacement for the Chair of Governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Yarwood

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools