

22 May 2015

Mrs Dawn Nulty
Headteacher
St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton
Flapper Fold Lane
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Dear Mrs Nulty

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Richard's Roman Catholic Primary School Atherton, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. 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:

- sharpen the school development plan, making sure that the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 targets clearly indicate senior leaders' expectations for the achievement of the different groups of pupils in the school
- ensure that the success criteria in the plan relate to the intended impact of the actions being taken to improve the school and are not just a checklist of activities having been completed.

Evidence

During my visit I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, a representative of the local authority and a group of subject leaders. These meetings were held to discuss the actions being taken by you and your colleagues to improve the school. I had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body and met with a group of captivating Year 5 pupils who eagerly shared with me their opinions about the school and talked about the quality of the work in their books.

You accompanied me on a tour of the school, where I was able to visit classrooms and see the pupils and staff at work. I examined a number of documents including senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing, the school development plan, senior leaders' monitoring records and minutes of governors' monitoring committee meetings.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have accepted the findings of inspectors at the previous inspection and are using them as a spring-board for further improvement.

The school presents as a calm place of learning. The pupils are warm, welcoming and friendly. In those lessons visited, I found pupils hard at work, engaged and on task. I saw numerous examples of effective group work, with pupils willing to help each other understand the activities they had been given to do. Teachers had planned a range of tasks to meet the needs of the different groups in the class, with teaching assistants effectively deployed to assist pupils with their learning. As a result, pupils were making progress that was at least in-line with teachers' expectations.

The time senior and middle leaders have invested in improving pupils' literacy in Key Stage 1 is beginning to pay dividends. For example, in one Year 2 lesson pupils' were able to define a number of literary terms and use them, effectively, in their writing. Evidence in pupils' books indicates they are given opportunities to write at length, enabling them to use their imaginations, be creative and hone their literacy skills. The school reports that, as a result of these strategies, pupils' attainment in writing, by the end of Key Stage 1, is set to rise by nine percentage points this year.

In the sample of pupils' books that I scrutinised, teachers' marking is regular and consistent with school policy; teachers informing pupils what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work, which most pupils subsequently act on. As a result, marking is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

When asked, pupils said that behaviour in school is good and relationships between all members of the community strong. As one pupil said, 'we all get on well together and are like a family'. Consequently, pupils feel safe and respect the right of each other to learn.

Senior leaders monitor pupils' progress regularly. The data collected on each pupil's performance are analysed to determine whether they are on track to reach their end of year targets and, if not, to identify what support is needed to help them do so.

Senior leaders use a range of evidence to check the quality of teaching in the school including regular observations of teachers' classroom practice, analysis of pupils' progress data and scrutiny of the work in pupils' books. The school reports that, taken together, these strategies are having a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Current data indicate that the attainment of pupils in Year 2 is approaching 2014 national averages, in reading, writing and mathematics and in Year 6 all pupils are making at least expected progress in these subjects.

Senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing is detailed and the findings of this evaluation are used to inform the school's development plan, which has been refined in the light of the previous inspection. The objectives in the plan are linked to the areas for improvement in the previous Ofsted report and each objective is accompanied by a clear set of actions. However, the success criteria in the plan could be sharper. For example, the success criteria related to pupils' attainment and progress are given as headline figures and have not been broken down into pupil groups. Consequently, it is difficult for the governors' monitoring committee to ascertain the progress being made by, for example, disadvantaged pupils and so determine the impact of the additional government funding the school receives through the pupil premium.

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 provided ongoing and effective support to the school and as a result has ensured that planning is in place to move the school forward. Financial support from the local authority has enabled some staff to undergo additional training including nationally recognised development programmes. This is enabling these staff to increase their expertise and share their learning with colleagues; with the intention of continuing to improve professional practice across the school.

An independent consultant has been working, effectively, with staff to improve provision in the Early Years and Foundation Stage. The school reports, that as a result of this intervention the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is currently 23 percentage points higher than last year and is now above the 2014 national average.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Director of Children's Services for Wigan.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector