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Mrs Jacqui Richards
Headteacher
St John Fisher Catholic Primary School
Burney Drive
Loughton
IG10 2DY

Dear Mrs Richards

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 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 recent section 5 inspection and the Section 8 monitoring visit. The school should take further action to:

- establish better working relationships and more effective communication with parents
- make sure that new governors are fully aware of their role in holding the headteacher to account for standards at the school
- further improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils achieve well
- ensure that there are effective induction arrangements for new teachers in September 2015.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, six middle leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met with two representatives of the local authority and spoke with the Director of Education for the Diocese of Brentwood. I evaluated the school's action plan and associated documents. I looked at Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered several complaints that Ofsted had received from parents. I also met with three newly qualified teachers to discuss the support that they have received since starting at the school in September 2014.

Context

Since the previous inspection six governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, have resigned. The local authority and the diocese have helped to recruit replacements with suitable experience and expertise. At the time of this inspection the new governors had only recently taken on their role. Seven teachers, including five middle leaders, have secured teaching posts in other schools and will be leaving the school at the end of the Summer term, 2015.

Main findings

Although school leaders have begun to address many of the issues identified at the inspection in June 2014, the school's progress towards becoming good has been severely affected by a breakdown in the relationship between the headteacher and several former members of the governing body, and numerous changes to the teaching staff. As a result, the improvements that have been made are not yet embedded. Progress may be further affected by the departure of seven teachers, five of whom have middle leadership responsibility, at the end of this term.

There have been a number of positive developments. The plans for improvement are now more precise. They contain clearer criteria for measuring impact, along with appropriate timescales. This means that senior leaders, including governors, are able to check on the impact of the school's work. There are now more robust procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and learning. Middle leaders have a better understanding of their role and have developed a good awareness of standards across the school. They make regular checks on pupils' work and also observe teaching. Evidence provided during this inspection indicates that the quality of teaching and learning is improving but there is still too much teaching that requires improvement. This is reflected in the school's assessment records, which show that pupils are likely to achieve better results in the end of key stage tests this year but standards at the end of Year 6 are still likely to be below where they should be.

Newly qualified teachers, who took up post last year, say that they have been well supported during their first year of teaching. They particularly value the feedback that they have received following work scrutiny and observations of their teaching.

They said that they have received good advice and guidance from senior leaders at the school and have had access to appropriate training.

Despite these improvements, many parents continue to have concerns about the leadership of the school. Parents are also concerned at the many changes to the teaching staff which have occurred over recent years. Five middle leaders will be leaving the school at the end of this term which will further reduce leadership capacity at the school in the short-term. School leaders have tried to keep parents informed about developments but parents continue to register their concerns and most parents feel that the school does not respond well to the issues that they raise. Only half of the parents who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey, would recommend the school to others, and the majority of those parents believe that the school is not well led and managed.

External support

The local authority and the diocese have concerns about the school and are monitoring developments closely. The local authority is providing high levels of support and challenge to school leaders. An adviser regularly works alongside the headteacher and an improvement board, which includes members of the governing body along with local authority officers, meets on a monthly basis to review progress and hold school leaders to account. The local authority has worked with the diocese to make sure that the recently appointed governors have suitable experience and expertise; for example the new Chair of the Governing Body is the headteacher of a local secondary school. It is vital that new governors quickly gain an understanding of the challenges facing the school so that they can both support and challenge school leaders to make the necessary improvements as quickly as possible and regain the trust of parents.

I will return to the school during the Autumn term 2015 to review progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Brentwood.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector