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Miss Moira Kenneway
Headteacher
St Aidan's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Miss Kenneway

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 October 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 governors train to fulfil their challenge role, in line with the recent review of governance
- complete revisions to action plans, using more measurable milestones
- extend the use of personal development profiles to teaching assistants
- create more opportunities for children to present and publish their work.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met you, other senior leaders, several groups of teachers, and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I talked with representatives of the archdiocese and local authority about

evidence of progress since my last visit. I considered the revised action plan and documents linked with it, including provisional Key Stage results for 2015.

A key part of the visit was meeting children who presented their work to me. They had chosen the work themselves and explained how they had improved. These meetings included children from Reception to Year 6.

Context

A new business manager has started in post, with the effect that the headteacher is freer to carry out more of her role in leading monitoring, evaluation, and learning. The deputy headteacher will share a class from September, to enable her to give more demonstration and coaching lessons, in line with the school's action plan. Replacements have been appointed for three teachers leaving at the end of term.

Main findings

On this visit, teachers and children talked about improvements with knowledge and enthusiasm. Teachers now know their roles in the action plan, how it affects work in the classroom, and the impact on children's progress. As several said: 'We see the bigger picture.' Through case studies of pupils' learning, and thoughtful feedback from senior staff, teachers have begun to shape their own improvements with confidence. Teachers set targets, gather evidence, and share successful strategies.

Teachers explained how they have re-planned lessons and taught in different ways, starting from what pupils can do already and the knowledge and understanding they need to achieve at the end of a unit of work. In school, this is called 'teaching backwards' with the end for the pupil in mind. Half-termly meetings between the headteacher and each class teacher have become professional conversations about learning needs of pupils and the best teaching techniques to meet needs. All teachers have a personal development profile which relates to the action plan.

The children I met were well able to explain how they had improved. In Reception, children who were at 'mark-making' stage in January are now writing two or three sentences in readable print. Reception and Year 1 children explained how 'learning ladders' and feedback from teachers had helped them to move from 'scruffy' presentation to work they were proud of. They were aware that basic spellings should be correct in subjects other than English.

Pupils I met in Key Stage 2 could explain stages of drafting to produce good writing. They had many examples to show me of where this process had worked well. Examples showed good variety: persuasive letters; leaflets; crime investigation reports; poems about cities. Year 6 pupils spoke with understanding about how they had used rhetorical devices in their writing. Older pupils described a range of new challenges, such as in mathematics, which they welcomed.

In all year groups, children spoke audibly, looked at others, used full sentences, gave explanations, and waited quietly for others to speak. Most could use correct grammar, appropriate for a formal situation and large group.

Teaching assistants now encourage pupils more to find answers for themselves, such as using a word bank in their English lessons rather than writing the spelling for them. Teaching assistants have had feedback about their groupwork from teachers and senior leaders but do not as yet have the systematic approach found for teachers through their development profiles.

Provisional results for 2015 show improvement in Early Years, in Year 1 phonics tests, and across all subjects at the end of Key Stage 2. For instance, 35% gained Level 5 in mathematics and writing, 58% in the reading test. While Key Stage 1 results showed improvement, particularly in writing where outcomes were low last year, school targets were not met. Senior leaders and teachers have analysed why targets were not met and have put action in place in response during June and July, whereas before it could have been left until the new school year. Across the school, teachers in the receiving year group use evidence to give a 'wish list' of gaps in pupils' skills to the teacher in the year below, who changes her teaching accordingly.

The action plan itself has been reviewed by senior leaders, supported by the local authority. Supporting papers start with an overview of whole school data, going on to explain why small groups surpassed or did not achieve targets, and what percentages mean in terms of individual children and needs. It is clearer now who is responsible for actions. In the revised plan, 'monitoring' (checking) and 'evaluation' (effects of actions) are treated separately. Reference is made to national changes to assessment, which in future will be without levels. In the final version of the revised plan, targets will be more specific and relate to each year and pupil group.

In these ways, clear threads can be seen between whole school plans and improvements to children's learning, a unity of effort due to the effective leadership of the headteacher and deputy head. For example, the headteacher has reviewed progress on the original action plan of Autumn 2014. Her thoughtful annotations make connections between intentions and impact, with an honest appraisal of where things have not worked. Staff are now confident to analyse why – such as by talking with pupils, analysing data, scrutinising work together, sharing teaching and planning, doing a case study – to remedy the problem. The deputy headteacher has successfully coached and trained staff, providing demonstration lessons or working alongside teachers where progress is not yet as intended.

The governing body review report was received in April. However, governor numbers have declined to four currently. They have worked hard to recruit while at the same time acting on several recommendations of the review. For example, the Chair of Governors has met new parents, as a result of which people volunteered as parent governors. Another governor has done learning walks in school and looked at pupils' books. However, most of the recommendations of the review have not yet been

achieved because of vacancies on the governing body. The five new governors will visit the school in July and begin their formal role in September.

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

Since my first visit in January 2015, a local authority school improvement officer has visited the school seven times. Key visits focused on classroom observation and scrutiny of pupils' work, jointly with school leaders. School and external evaluations were in line. The effect of this has been to increase skills of self-evaluation and making judgements amongst senior staff.

The diocese has taken part in appointments to help the school to be fully staffed. A key role is regarding filling foundation governor vacancies, as identified by the review of governance in April - five new governors have now been identified and one vacancy remains. The diocese intends to provide training for the governing body to address issues of data and challenge. It is not possible to evaluate impact as yet.

- The diocese to ensure that, in line with the review of governance, vacancies are filled on the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector