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Paul Heaton
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mr Heaton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 November 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 May 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:

- build upon the improvements seen from some teachers by giving further opportunities for teachers to share good and outstanding practice
- accelerate improvements in the quality of the teaching and learning in writing, particularly in Key Stage 1, by enhancing leadership capacity for this specific area.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, subject leaders, a group of eight pupils, six members of the governing body, a national leader of education and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Documents were scrutinised, including the school development plan, safeguarding checks and assessment information. I

also visited a number of classrooms with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning.

Context

Several experienced members of staff have left the school since the most recent inspection. A new deputy headteacher took up her post in September. New English and mathematics subject leadership teams have been established. Governors have reconstituted and a new chair and vice-chair have been appointed to the governing body.

Main findings

You, senior leaders and governors have carefully considered the findings of the recent inspection. While initially disappointed, you have drawn a line in the sand and are determined to make the improvements needed to steer the school on its journey to becoming good.

Your plan for improvement is effective in setting out a route towards improvement. The criteria to measure your success are clear. Milestones to gauge your progress along the way ensure that everyone knows if you are on track to make the difference needed to improve outcomes for pupils in the school.

You have wasted little time in setting about introducing changes to improve mathematics across the school. Teachers now take more time to deliver mathematical units, so that they are sure that all pupils have developed a solid understanding of the concept being taught. In some classes, teachers are rapidly growing in confidence and are trying new approaches to develop pupils' reasoning skills. In Year 6, for example, pupils were enthused by an investigation to find missing numbers in a complex calculation. As a consequence, the mathematical learning in this year group is moving forward strongly. Nonetheless, as we discussed, improvements are progressing more rapidly in some year groups than in others. For instance, in a small number of classes, some pupils are spending longer than they need to on repetitive questions that do not suitably challenge them or move learning forward quickly enough.

Introducing the significant changes required to improve the quality of teaching and learning in writing is taking longer. This is because you and other senior leaders are taking time to fully explore a range of approaches to ensure that you implement the strategy that is right for the school. You and governors are aware that this is a matter of some urgency and requires an imminent decision and action. In the meantime, greater emphasis has been placed on the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar across the school to ensure that pupils' basic skills improve. Changes have also been made to the way teachers plan their lessons so that writing units develop in a sequence that supports learning.

You have taken appropriate action to address the issue that teaching assistants were not fully effective in supporting pupils' learning. Teaching assistants now meet regularly with class teachers to discuss planning so that they know exactly what is expected of them during lessons. Furthermore, they now play a greater role in assessing pupils' understanding of what is being taught. Teachers use this information to help them plan lessons and direct support so that pupils do not fall behind. Teaching assistants have attended training on mathematics and have weekly meetings to share ideas with one another. As a consequence, teaching assistants say that morale is high and that they feel their role is valued.

The role of subject leaders is developing. You have managed the changes caused by experienced middle leaders leaving the school effectively and new mathematics and English teams are in place. The newly appointed deputy headteacher is supporting their development well. However, you are aware that leadership capacity needs to be enhanced further for the specific area of improving the quality of writing within the school.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the changes that you have introduced. They say that they enjoy the higher level of challenge in mathematics, as it is helping them to 'think more'. They also say that improvements in the quality of marking are giving them more opportunities to respond to teachers' comments, helping them to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils are proud of their school and of their work. One comment that is typical of pupils' views is: 'work has got harder, but it feels easier because of how well we are taught'.

Governors share your appetite for improvement. They have a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and recognise that improvements are not yet consistently strong across every class. They give of their time generously and are now a more visible presence in the school. Some governors have undergone training to enhance their skills. As a result, governors now have a greater understanding of what data is telling them and are beginning to ask more challenging questions to hold leaders to account.

An external review of how effectively pupil premium funding is spent is scheduled to begin shortly.

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

You have quickly established strong and professional relationships with Guardian Angels Roman Catholic Primary School, the national support school commissioned by the local authority to support you. Staff have observed outstanding teaching at this school and as a consequence have raised expectations about they and pupils can

achieve. The guidance of an external mathematics consultant has also contributed strongly to the improvements in mathematics at the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell

Her Majesty's Inspector