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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
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Mr Steve Chiswell
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Dunstable Road
Caddington
Luton
LU1 4BB

Dear Mr Chiswell

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

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2016, 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 October 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in October 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that precise targets and timescales are included within the school improvement plan to facilitate the accurate monitoring of performance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also undertook a tour of the school with you and the deputy headteacher to review the quality of pupils' work in English and mathematics.

Context

A pre-school for children aged two to four years was opened on the school site in January 2016. The pre-school is managed by the governing body.

Main findings

You have generated a clear sense of purpose among the staff of the need to improve in order for the school to become good at its next inspection. The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are now much higher in English and mathematics. This is clearly evident in the pupils' books in all classes throughout the school. Handwriting and presentation have improved, with greater proportions of pupils working at age-related expectations in writing and mathematics. The quality and consistency of marking and feedback has improved following the recent implementation of revised policies for assessment. Pupils respond well to this better feedback and especially so when they are set further tasks to complete. This high-quality marking is better in English than in mathematics.

In partnership with your deputy headteacher, you have introduced an effective method of recording the pupils' progress against age-related expectations in English and mathematics. The information being gathered is accurate. You and your subject leaders are now able to effectively monitor the progress of each individual pupil and identify where extra support is needed. Analysis of this information confirms a trend of improvement in pupils' outcomes since the last inspection.

Priorities contained within the improvement plan are appropriate. The timescales for action are realistic, but dates for completion are too general to facilitate rapid improvement. Roles and responsibilities are appropriately identified to provide clear lines of accountability. However, it is not clear from the plan how the completion of each target will be monitored and who will do this. Furthermore, targets are too imprecise to facilitate the effective measurement of success and increased levels of performance. This is a weakness.

A rapid initiation of the review of governance has led to the governing body making significant changes to its working practices and procedures. As a result, governors take a greater role in monitoring school improvement. Better information about pupil progress enables them to ask challenging questions of school leaders with greater confidence. Teamwork is a strength and governors demonstrate strong levels of commitment to ensure the school's success.

External support

Support from the local authority since the last inspection has been significant. You are making effective links with school professionals in other schools, with proven leadership capacity, to support your own development. Specialist advisers provide effective levels of guidance to those teachers with middle leadership responsibility.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Northampton and the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector