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Mr Lyndon Strong
Acting Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Anns Hill Road
Gosport
Hampshire
PO12 3NB

Dear Mr Strong

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

Following my visit to your school on 5 October 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, the early years leader, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and records of monitoring by senior leaders were reviewed. Brief visits were made to all classes, to see the school in action.

Context

Following the school's inspection in May 2015, the headteacher retired in July 2015. The deputy headteacher is acting headteacher. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed from another school. Several new teachers joined in September 2015 with responsibility for pupils in Reception, Year 2, Year 3 and a mixed Year 3 and Year 4 class.

Main findings

You are highly ambitious for St Mary's, and very determined to make the necessary improvements as quickly as possible. Staff say 'we know what we're doing' because you give them a strong lead on the way forward. There is a shared commitment to becoming a good school.

You have certainly raised the bar regarding standards of uniform and pupils' presentation. Pupils are more smartly dressed, showing pride in their school. The new displays showcasing good presentation and work of high quality help everyone to know what you expect. These motivate pupils to do their best to achieve the recently introduced gold award for presentation.

There is a stronger focus on rewarding good behaviour. Pupils who consistently behave well eagerly look forward to a choice of activities in 'golden time' sessions. At the same time, those who misbehave face the consequences, as adults address misdemeanours more quickly. Pupils say the new system is working well and that 'people feel they have to be better or they lose golden time'. Pupils also appreciate the opportunity to have lunch with you at the 'top table' as a reward for good manners and good behaviour at lunchtime.

The school is at the early stages of developing a new system to collect information about pupils' progress, linked to the new curriculum. There are sensible plans to check teachers' judgements with schools outside the local area, to ensure the conclusions they make are robust. Meetings with teachers to discuss pupils who are falling behind now focus more sharply on pupils' individual needs. Consequently, more pupils receive the right support to help them catch up.

Your detailed action plan is a helpful document to drive improvement because it shows everyone exactly what to aim for, how to achieve the goals and how leaders will check to see if action is effective. You rightly plan to use new assessment information to sharpen targets for pupils' achievement, to help measure success. You know you need to allow time for changes to embed so that improvements may be sustained.

The enthusiastic English and mathematics leaders now have allocated time to carry out their role, which they sensibly use to check important areas such as the quality of pupils' work. However, they each use different criteria to make their judgements

so teachers do not always receive consistent messages. Nonetheless, middle leaders have a better handle on which areas staff need to develop, and as a result of their support, teaching is starting to improve. For example, more tasks are now set at the right level of challenge, although this is not consistent across the school.

The early years classrooms have been refurbished, and there are better resources to support learning, such as the well fitted-out mud kitchen. You recognise there is more to do to ensure the curriculum fully meets children's needs and you are sensibly taking advice from the local authority to make the necessary improvements.

Governors are aspirational for the school and fully support your drive for improvement. They rightly take ownership for their own development to ensure that they offer the right level of challenge and support. For example, the new position of 'governor for training and development' ensures all governors receive effective induction support and training to ask the right questions. The new data sub-committee ensures there is suitable scrutiny of the school's information.

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

The local authority offers strong support in a range of areas including leadership, teaching and learning. This is helpfully tailored to meet the school's specific needs. The diocese has provided useful training for governors. You are rightly emphasising and using good practice in other schools to develop the staff team.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector