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Mrs Carol Minihan
The Annunciation RC Junior School
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Dear Mrs Minihan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Annunciation RC Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 23 March 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 March 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- track more sharply the progress of smaller groups of pupils, for example those pupils who are advanced bilingual learners of the English language to ensure that they achieve as well as they should
- strengthen lines of communication between the governing body and parents.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's post-Ofsted action plan was evaluated. Each class was visited with the headteacher, to review pupils' writing and reading comprehension work in books. The inspector also looked at pupils' writing on display throughout the school. The headteacher of St James' Catholic High School in Barnet spoke to the inspector about her role as executive headteacher in the first half of this academic year. The inspector scrutinised reports from the external review of governance and pupil premium funding. The local authority's reviews of achievement and teaching were also considered. The inspector met directly with 10 parents at the start of the inspection. The single central record was reviewed to examine safer recruitment checks for staff appointed since the last inspection.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been a number of changes to staffing. Four teachers left the school in August 2015. Two supply teachers were appointed in September 2015 for the academic year to cover substantive positions. An existing member of staff replaced the special educational needs leader. A teacher returned from maternity leave to class teaching. The previous headteacher retired in August 2015. She was initially replaced on a temporary basis by the deputy headteacher. The deputy headteacher was made the permanent headteacher in February 2016. There is currently an acting deputy headteacher pending national recruitment to fill this vacancy permanently. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in December 2015.

Main findings

Senior leaders, supported by the temporary executive headteacher, responded rapidly to the findings of the previous inspection. Leaders quickly produced an appropriate plan to improve pupils' progress in reading and writing that clearly shows who is accountable for each area and who will monitor the impact of their actions. Everyone in the school community understands how, what and when key improvements will be achieved. All are focused on developing the quality of teaching and using the best practice from within the school and beyond.

The new headteacher is developing a culture where subject leaders are fully involved in shaping and feeding into the school's improvement planning work. For example, senior leaders have adapted the improvement plan as a result of checks made by subject leaders on their areas of responsibility. As a result, the school is currently on track to improve the areas identified at the previous inspection.

Staff at all levels and governors have been galvanised. They are unified behind a clear aspiration that no child will be left behind and that all will achieve their very best.

A smooth transition from the previous headteacher to the current senior leadership team has ensured a consistent focus on addressing historical underachievement. Senior leaders have ensured that there has been a range of extra support which meets individual pupils' needs. However, leaders do not rely on additional support to boost performance. A rigorous drive to improve the quality of teaching from the start of Year 3 ensures that pupils benefit from better teaching from the start of their time at the school. This is helping pupils to make more consistent progress in reading and writing.

The headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher have empowered middle leaders to take responsibility for leading their subject areas. Middle leaders seek out good ideas, for example from the local teaching school, and adapt them for their own pupils. As a result, the teaching of reading and writing across the school is improving. In particular, pupils are developing better skills in reading and responding to poetry. Effective practice is now better shared between teachers and celebrated in staff meetings.

Teachers' oral and written feedback to pupils is now more sharply focused and complies with leaders' expectations. Pupils understand better how to improve their reading and writing. Teachers are increasingly asking questions which deepen pupils' thinking and allow them to justify their ideas. As a result, pupils are becoming more effective learners.

Teachers and parents are proud of the improvements that the school has secured since the previous inspection. However, senior leaders are aware that they must continue to drive improvements so that all pupils make good progress from their starting points over time. Leaders agree they need to use information about pupils' progress more precisely. For example, the progress of pupils who are advanced learners of English as an additional language and those who are new to learning it is not tracked carefully enough at the moment.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils is at the very heart of the school's plans for improvement. Staff discuss the progress made by these pupils more regularly to ensure pupils' needs are being met. Leaders challenge teachers to adjust their teaching and further accelerate pupils' progress where necessary. All checks on learning and teaching now consider the progress of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, gaps in the attainment in reading and writing between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are now closing.

Scrutiny of pupils' writing shows that their presentation has improved since the last inspection and is continuing to get better. Expectations are higher and staff

challenge pupils to present their work using their best handwriting at all times. Parents spoke of the positive impact this was having on their children. One said, 'My child now wants to sit properly when they are writing their homework. This has never happened before.' Parents spoke of the increasing pride and enjoyment that their children have in their learning. 'This was always a school that did what it had to do, but an element of enjoyment has now been put into teaching.'

The school's own information and evidence from workbooks show that pupils are making increasingly consistent progress. More pupils are making the more rapid progress expected of them and variation between year groups is reducing. In part, this is due to the increased challenge from teachers and the keenness with which pupils respond to higher expectations. One pupil explained, 'Teachers expect more of us now, they want more from us each day so we do our very best.'

Governance has improved. The external review of governance has been instrumental in helping to identify how and why governors needed to improve. The new chair of the governing body has worked swiftly to make changes. Governors challenge leaders more actively about the impact of their actions on the progress being made to improve standards. They visit the school more regularly, have clearer responsibilities and report their findings to the wider governing body. Governors understand their core responsibilities more clearly. However, some parents spoke of their desire to have stronger communication with governors. They feel they do not know governors well enough, or hear from them about what they do to help improve the school.

External support

The local authority has provided a wide range of external support that has been effectively tailored to the needs of the school. The school's local authority officer and subject consultants have provided sharp challenge to senior leaders and governors. The local authority was instrumental in helping to commission the temporary executive headteacher.

The temporary executive headteacher (the headteacher of St James' Catholic High School in Barnet) provided high-quality support during the school's formal partnership in the first half of this academic year. This support helped to ensure that the newly appointed headteacher further accelerated the pace of improvements across the school. This formal partnership of support also fostered links between the secondary English, mathematics, science and special educational needs departments and the junior school subject leaders. This is helping staff to understand the expectations of the Key Stage 3 curriculum and to develop better subject leadership. For example, the secondary special educational needs manager has coached the new junior school special educational needs coordinator in how to deal with multi-agency support, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS).

I am copying this letter to the chair of governing body, the director of education for the archdiocese of Westminster, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for London Borough of Barnet. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Storrie
Her Majesty's Inspector