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Mrs Sonia Fraser
St Anne's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Fraser

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

Following my visit to your school on 22 April 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 June 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 June 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone call was held with the diocesan representative. The school improvement plans were evaluated. We visited classrooms together, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work. A range of documents were scrutinised, including records relating to the monitoring of teaching and governing body minutes. I checked documentation and information linked to safeguarding.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have taken up your post as the new headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has also been appointed. Two teachers and two teaching assistants have left the school. There are three new governors and the chair of the governing body has changed.

Main findings

Governors have successfully secured the senior leadership of the school. There is now in place a highly motivated leadership team formed by you and the deputy headteacher. The level of challenge from the governing body is much sharper and more clearly focused upon improving pupils' outcomes. This is starting to increase the level of accountability for both senior and middle leaders.

You are robustly tackling weaknesses in the quality of teaching. Appropriate support and training have been provided where teaching is not strong enough. Regular checks by you and the deputy headteacher along with the local authority adviser ensure that the necessary improvements to teaching are made. Improvements to teaching are evident in early years and in Year 6 where the deputy headteacher is based. However, the remaining classes are currently taught by supply teachers and this sometimes limits the impact of the school's developments.

A wide range of systems to improve the quality of teaching have been introduced. The curriculum planning has been revised to better match the national curriculum. This is beginning to increase the continuity of pupils' learning, and starting to provide a better match of the teaching to pupils' needs. The introduction of assessment systems linked to this revised curriculum is helping teachers and leaders to identify pupils' learning gaps. As a result, teachers are now planning work to accelerate pupils' progress. Leaders are very focused on ensuring consistency of approach with these systems. However, the proportion of supply teachers can on occasion mean that the school's systems are not fully followed.

The school's approach to marking is more effective. Teachers generally follow the marking policy consistently and pupils understand how this can improve their work. There is early evidence that marking is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Middle leadership capacity is weak. Targeted support to improve middle leadership in English, mathematics and provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability has had restricted impact as these staff are currently absent from school. You and the deputy headteacher are currently fulfilling these roles and this is ensuring that the required improvements are taking place.

Early years provision is improving. There are now more clearly defined opportunities to develop children's reading, writing, number and creative skills. However, staff expectations of children's learning behaviours are not consistently high enough. As a result, while the opportunities for learning have improved, children with teaching assistant support do not engage as effectively with their learning. The early years leader has benefited from support by another school and the local authority. This has helped the early years leader have a clearer understanding of the priorities for development and how to improve provision. Further development of the leadership skills for checking the impact of these changes is required.

You have put in place a plan to address the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. While the plan includes appropriate actions, it could be improved by identifying more specific time frames for some actions and being clearer about who is responsible and accountable for completion of monitoring and evaluating the plan.

The external review of the use of the pupil premium was completed in February 2016. It identifies key recommendations which the school has begun to address. The review of governance has been commissioned. However, this is not yet completed. It is important that governors respond promptly to the review's recommendations once published.

External support

The school has benefited from external support by the local authority and that organised through the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. School support has been provided by St John Bosco RC School and Cardinal Hume Catholic School. The support has been appropriate to the needs of the school and effectively coordinated. However, its impact has in some places been diminished due to the changing staff profile and staff absence.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector