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Mr Neil Lockyer
Headteacher
St Paul's Catholic School
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Dear Mr Lockyer

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

Following my visit to your school on 24 June 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 December 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that the gaps in attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to others in the school continue to close, particularly in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke on the telephone to two advisers for Leicester local authority. I reviewed the school improvement plan, the report following an external review of governance, the school's single central record, the school's latest achievement data and governors' minutes. I made short visits to lessons in English, science and mathematics.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a science teacher has left the school and two teachers will be leaving the school at the end of term. You have recently appointed a new head of science who will take up their post at the school in September 2016.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders have taken appropriate steps to act on the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. You, other leaders and governors have a clear and coherent vision for the improvement of this school. This vision is known and understood by all.

You have taken prompt action to address underperformance in science. As a result, the outcomes that the school leaders presently predict pupils to achieve in GCSE science this year and next will be in line with current national expectations.

The senior leadership team has taken effective action to ensure that all staff are focused on improving the quality of teaching. All teachers have been provided with clear guidance on the senior leaders' high expectations for teaching. All teachers now use assessment information to plan appropriate learning to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Middle leaders work together and with senior leaders to support each other's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, middle leaders have a more secure understanding of how to evaluate the quality of teaching. They have appreciated being able to share knowledge, discuss good practice and support each other. The school's own records of the quality of teaching indicate that there has been an improvement in teaching since the last inspection. Senior leaders have worked with external agencies to ensure that this evaluation is accurate.

The senior leader in charge of staff professional development has provided a range of training for teachers to improve their practice. This has included training on how to use questioning effectively in lessons to check on pupils' progress and to develop their knowledge and understanding. As a result, teachers are more confident in using questions which provide appropriate challenge for pupils of different abilities, as well as checking on their understanding so they can be given extra support if they fall behind.

Senior leaders have reviewed the mathematics curriculum and ensured that pupils regularly develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. This is clearly evident in pupils' mathematics books. Pupils I spoke with confirmed that most mathematics lessons now include problem-solving and that this is helping them to make progress.

You have taken swift action to improve pupils' behaviour in lessons since the last inspection by introducing a non-negotiable classroom code of behaviour. Staff have all had training on this new system and consequently they are clear about

your high expectations. All pupils I spoke with said that teachers apply the new system consistently and as a result behaviour and learning have improved.

Senior leaders have developed a more effective system by which leaders at all levels monitor and track pupils' progress and report to governors. Leaders and governors now have a clearer understanding of how well different groups of pupils are doing. This has meant that pupils who are not making the required progress receive more timely interventions. As a result, the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others are closing, particularly in English. However, you have identified that you need to do more to close the attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in mathematics.

You have revised the school's improvement plan. There is now one central document called the 'St Paul's single plan', which includes your whole-school actions, evaluations and review. Consequently, you and senior leaders can more easily monitor the effectiveness of actions you are taking to improve the school.

Governors have been quick to commission the external review of their leadership role within the school. However, the review was not helpful in providing precise actions for improvement. The chair of governors recognised this. She has undertaken further independent research on national governance to gain a clearer understanding of the role of governors and to ensure that governors continue to offer appropriate support and challenge to the school.

Two new governors have been appointed since the last inspection, both with backgrounds in education.

Your single central record and school website meet statutory requirements.

External support

The school has drawn effectively on a variety of external support. The local authority's regular monitoring visits ensure that it is kept well informed of the school's progress and that the school is focused on the right priorities for improvement. The local authority provides additional advice and guidance to the school on supporting your disadvantaged pupils. You have also worked closely with local schools to develop a key stage 3 tracking and assessment system. This has helped you to monitor pupils' progress more closely and to provide more timely intervention for any pupil who is falling behind. Subject leaders of English, mathematics and science attend Leicester city subject networks, where they share good practice and check on the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Senior leaders have also arranged for support from external agencies and examination boards for subject leaders to help plan for new curriculum content and assessment. Engaging with these external agencies has enabled subject leaders to sharpen their leadership skills and ensure that they have a precise focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. The school works successfully with local agencies to support pupils' well-being and to reinforce positive attitudes to learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Nottingham and the director of children's services for Leicester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector