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Dear Mrs Wright

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Wilfrid's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2016, 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that work being done to improve the quality of pupils' writing is having a positive impact in each phase of the school
- ensure that the governing body holds all leaders to account for their particular areas of responsibility and regularly checks to see whether the school is on course to achieve its progress and attainment targets

- seek ways to increase the level of support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders, some teachers and a group of pupils. Further discussions were held with the chair of the governing body and three other governors, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on a tour of the school in which we visited literacy and numeracy lessons, looked at pupils' books and observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. I also listened to a number of pupils read. I checked the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, documents relating to the performance management of teachers, assessment information and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the last inspection, staffing in the school has remained stable. Some classes have been re-organised so that more teaching is delivered in mixed age classes. A number of pupils have joined the school during the year, of whom a number speak English an additional language.

Main findings

The confidence gained from improved outcomes in 2016, together with stable staffing, is enabling the school to move forward and address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You consulted everyone on the school's plans for improvement following the last inspection in February and, as a result, all members of staff know what needs to improve and are working as a team to address the weaknesses. Your plans for improvement are sufficiently detailed to ensure that you can accurately evaluate the impact of your actions at key points across the year and keep the governing body informed of progress. However, while governors have a sound strategic grasp of the progress the school is making, they could do more to hold relatively new and inexperienced middle leaders to account. This would also ensure that governors gain a more detailed knowledge of the impact of their work.

You are managing teachers' performance rigorously. Teachers' annual objectives are now more challenging and quantify clearly the amount of progress you expect each class to make. You are ensuring that pupils' progress is assessed regularly and reviewed properly, so that any pupil making slower progress is quickly identified and given the additional support they need. Teachers feel accountable, but also well supported, and have good opportunities to access the training they need.

Last summer, you began a programme to strengthen the quality of leadership, which has begun to motivate and empower middle leaders effectively. This is

strengthening your capacity to sustain improvement. Middle leaders now make well-focused checks on the quality of teaching across the school and deliver useful training for their colleagues, in response to their findings. Consequently, aspects of teaching are improving and becoming more consistent. For example, teachers now routinely mark pupils' work in line with the agreed policy. The regular use of 'learning breaks', to review work during lessons, is helping pupils to overcome weaknesses in their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils also respond well to the marking they receive and regularly make corrections, and improve their work by completing further challenges set by the teacher.

A particular challenge you face is meeting the needs of the increasing number of pupils that join the school during the year and speak English as an additional language. In response, you have provided appropriate training for all staff and ensured that your classrooms are richly resourced with language-based displays and resources. Other adults provide effective support during lessons. However, some pupils would benefit from more in-class support, as their limited grasp of English is a barrier to their progress. You are making increased efforts to engage the families of pupils new to the school so that you can develop an effective partnership approach. You have begun to implement some creative approaches to engage families, such as the free breakfast club and the 'knit and natter' group.

Outcomes for pupils improved in 2016. The proportion of children that attained a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year increased sharply. You now provide more opportunities for children to initiate early writing skills themselves. You supplement this with more formal teaching of key literacy and numeracy skills in the early years. More regular formal teaching of letters and the sounds they make, together with more formal work on basic number, is helping children to develop their skills earlier and more securely. Records in learning journals show that children are developing early writing skills more readily than in the past.

Reading and writing programmes in key stage 1 are also having a positive impact, reflected by the better outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check. Although still below the national average, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard has risen consistently over the last three years.

Outcomes at key stage 1 and key stage 2 are similar to those seen nationally, although pupils do not make as much progress in writing as they should. You have rightly identified this as a key area for improvement across the next year.

During this visit it was evident that good classroom routines are ensuring that lesson time is used productively. Teachers have well-developed strategies to draw pupils into lessons and make the learning enjoyable and interesting. Pupils proudly showed me examples of their work. There are some strong examples of extended writing, where particular books, such as 'War Horse' and 'Alice in Wonderland', have been used to fire pupils' imaginations effectively.

External support

The school is benefiting from the support and challenge of the local authority. Good support is being provided to check on the school's progress and challenge and support leaders, where necessary. Local authority reports provide a useful and succinct analysis for governors. A range of consultants are working in the school and have had a positive impact on improving the learning environment within the early years provision. Clear guidance has informed the style of teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes and improved the teaching of writing.

The school is also benefiting from a partnership with St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School. The headteacher of the school is supporting leaders and governors to check on the school's progress. In addition, members of staff have visited the school and brought back ideas about how to challenge and stretch pupils more effectively.

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

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector