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8 December 2016

Mr Damien Thorpe
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Dear Mr Thorpe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 November 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:

- embed new leadership structures designed to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- rigorously monitor the progress of the most able pupils, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils
- include measurable success criteria in the action plan so leaders and governors can accurately monitor the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement
- ensure that the plans for governors to better challenge school leaders about pupils' progress are enacted rapidly and rigorously.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans and other documents provided by the school were evaluated. Work in pupils' books was scrutinised. The head of school and I made brief visits to lessons.

Context

In April 2016, you started work at the school. A new special educational needs coordinator also started in April 2016. In July 2016, a new chair of the governing body started. In September 2016, five new classroom teachers took up post out of six classroom teachers in the school overall. This school is federated to two other Catholic primary schools and the leadership of the federation has been restructured since September 2016 to include overall leaders of mathematics, assessment, early years and special educational needs. Each school in the federation has a newly appointed link governor.

Main findings

Prior to September, work to bring about school improvement had limited impact. You have set the bar high and raised expectations for staff and pupils. The newly appointed leadership team for the federation has the energy and enthusiasm needed to drive school improvement and meet your high expectations. As a result, you and the team, together with the new teachers, now have the capacity to bring about the changes needed for the school to become a good school. Year 6 pupils say that the school has really improved since September.

Clear actions are planned to bring about the improvements needed; however, the actions are not linked to timed and measurable success criteria. This reduces the effectiveness with which senior leaders and governors can monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions taken.

The changes you have made to the new curriculum have increased pupils' engagement in their learning. Teachers and pupils know your high expectations for the quality and quantity of work to be completed in lessons. Staff and pupils are proud of the way feedback is used to help pupils improve their writing and correct their answers in mathematics. Year 6 pupils spoke highly about what they are learning, for example, in history and science. All the pupils recognised how the improvements in mathematics teaching and assessment are helping them with their understanding and engagement.

New assessment systems and teachers' better understanding of the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have resulted in teachers building effectively on pupils' prior learning. As a result, teachers are beginning to provide work that more closely matches the needs of pupils. Teachers are starting to offer an increased challenge for the most able pupils. However, this is not embedded and the impact is not measured because senior leaders do not track the progress of the most able group of pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Teachers' accountability for pupils' progress has increased. Teachers map each pupil's progress and are able to identify individual ways in which they can help pupils increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. It is too soon to see the impact of these interventions. However, the system provides a vehicle for better analysis of school performance information.

Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are relatively recent. As a result, the outcomes at key stage 2 in 2016 do not reflect the impact of leaders' efforts in bringing about improvements. In particular, unvalidated data suggests that the outcomes in mathematics will be well below the expected national average. The most able pupils made insufficient progress at key stage 2. The latest collection of progress information is more accurate than data collected last year. However, it is too soon to judge from the progress information whether improvements in the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment are having the desired effect on key stage 2 outcomes. Nonetheless, there are early signs in pupils' books that they are making better progress.

You and your team have worked hard to improve attendance. Policies and procedures led by the head of school in liaison with the pupil support adviser and the education welfare officer make it clear to parents and pupils that good attendance is an expectation. Pupils value the rewards for good attendance. Consequently, attendance of all groups of pupils has improved. The number of pupils who are regularly absent has halved.

Work to improve the impact of governance has been too slow since the last inspection. The governors are willing and enthusiastic advocates for their school. The review of governance resulted in a plan to improve governors' knowledge and skills. It is too soon to see the impact of this plan. The new chair of the governing body is a national leader of governance. He has brought considerable experience to the federation and is determined to improve the impact of the governing body urgently. Meetings are planned in which the chair of the governing body and link governors will hold school leaders to account for pupils' progress. In the past, school leaders were insufficiently challenged by governors about pupils' outcomes. It is too soon to see the impact of the new procedures.

External support

The local authority representative is a regular visitor to the school and is part of a committee supporting governors in holding senior leaders to account for pupils' progress. Governors' skills have begun to develop as a result. The local authority undertook a review of the school in September 2016. Consequently, the local authority has provided finance to bring in brokered support from the Tykes Teaching School Alliance. Support is planned to improve the quality of teaching and the teaching of reading. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

The school works with external consultants to support teachers in planning and assessing the new curriculum. These developments are at an early stage; however, pupils report enjoyment of the new curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane

Her Majesty's Inspector