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Dear Ms Tuck

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 January 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are precisely linked to, and measured by, their impact on outcomes for pupils
- strengthen pupils' resilience and confidence as learners, particularly in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the federation executive headteacher, federation deputy headteacher, members of the governing body, leaders for literacy and mathematics, and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Her Majesty's Inspector reviewed the school's improvement plans, information about pupils' progress, curriculum planning and documentation related to the work of governors. Her Majesty's Inspector visited all classes to observe teaching and learning and spoke to a group of pupils about their work and their views of the school. An additional sample of work was scrutinised.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the previous inspection.

Main findings

There has been rapid improvement over the last year following the last inspection. School leaders have systematically prioritised the key areas to improve in the school and focused precisely on groups of pupils who need to catch up, including the most able and those eligible for the pupil premium. As a result, current pupils are making more progress and results for reading and writing at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 have improved, and in many cases compare well with national figures.

Leaders are far from complacent and have identified that pupils' progress in mathematics throughout the school is not strong enough. End of key stage 2 results in 2016 were below national expectations. In characteristic fashion, leaders and teachers have closely scrutinised pupils' results and mathematics progress overall. They have shrewdly identified that pupils in all year groups need to develop greater confidence with mathematical reasoning and completing test questions more efficiently.

The school's work to improve pupils' mathematical thinking was clearly evident during the inspection. Her Majesty's Inspector observed pupils explaining their reasoning in a variety of ways when working with decimals and fractions. Some pupils were able to say exactly why they preferred one method over another. In another class, younger pupils told the inspector some fascinating facts about adding odd and even numbers. Pupils' mathematics books clearly demonstrate that pupils are thinking about numbers and calculations at a deep and analytical level.

The school's approach to tackling weaknesses in mathematics is typical and demonstrates its ambition and determination. Leaders have a completely accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment because they monitor closely and frequently and know the pupils individually extremely well. Leaders carefully review what works and what does not work, followed up by precise

planning to tackle difficulties, support staff and maintain the focus on pupils. School leaders' plans are rightly focused on improving teaching and learning. However, it is not clear how actions to improve teaching will be judged because they are not linked closely enough to pupils' progress.

Middle leaders are now taking on more monitoring work. They have reviewed the curriculum in both mathematics and English to ensure that pupils understand more clearly the point of topics and know what they are aiming for. Pupils have more stimulating topics and also challenging reading which captures their imagination and fosters their emotional involvement. Middle leaders are reviewing pupils' work, what happens in lessons and information about progress. In this way, leadership has been strengthened and held to account more strictly.

School leaders have improved the curriculum and range of subjects on offer. French, art and technology now feature prominently in timetables. Pupils appreciate more stretch and challenge and the opportunity to learn about the world around them. Religious education covers a full range of faiths and cultures and Her Majesty's Inspector saw some moving and extremely thoughtful and empathetic writing from the point of view of different religious beliefs.

Pupils told the inspector that teaching had improved, that learning was more interesting and presented in a fun way. However, there is more to what pupils are learning than just fun. Pupils showed the inspector the pieces of work they are most proud of. These assignments were not gimmicky or superficial, but practical and useful tasks that helped pupils to learn and make good progress

Teachers' expectations are higher than previously and there is clear evidence that the most able pupils are being pushed more. But there are no ceilings or foregone conclusions based on what pupils may have attained previously. For those pupils who may have gaps in their learning as a result of a legacy of weaker teaching, but who actually may have more potential, there is careful attention to making sure that they are supported and challenged to reach higher targets.

The staff work as a team. They support each other and share practice, adhering to the sensible common principles promoted by leaders. Strong teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants enhances pupils' learning and progress in lessons and in their books. Leaders and governors have benefited from visiting other schools and sharing practice. There are regular opportunities for all staff, including teaching assistants, to reflect on and consider what is working well and what could be even better.

More confident staff means more confident management of pupils' behaviour. As teaching has improved, pupils' behaviour overall has improved. During the inspection, no disruptive behaviour was observed. However, school leaders have identified that there are some pupils in some year groups who find settling down to learning and concentrating difficult, partly from poor habits and partly because they

have particular needs. Pupils told the inspector that there are some pupils who are sometimes silly. However, there are very few serious incidents of poor behaviour that disrupt learning. Pupils generally get along well and have good relationships with their teachers. They want to learn and, when pushed, will try hard. Nevertheless, some pupils lack confidence and sit back rather than allow themselves to be noticed, for example when they have finished a task. Some pupils wait for direction from the teacher when they could work things out for themselves or sustain their concentration even more. Leaders have rightly identified this as a next step in improving pupils' attitudes to learning.

Governance has improved since the previous inspection. The structure of the governing body has been amended to enable more governors to be actively involved in monitoring the school. Governors are now able to see the bigger picture and take in a full view of the school, including challenging leaders and holding them to account.

Governors have had useful training. They visit the school regularly as part of their systematic monitoring, and their roles and responsibilities are defined. New members have joined the governing body and bring different professional skills, knowledge and experience. Decisions about the future of the school and its leadership model are debated honestly, strategically and with sensible use of background knowledge.

External support

The school has benefited over time from the strong support from Hampshire local authority, including helpful and detailed guidance from the mathematics and English advisers. In addition, the leadership learning partner has provided useful advice for the senior leadership team and carried out regular objective reviews of the school's performance. As a result, the current senior leaders have become more assured in their vision, planning and professional development. Middle leaders have developed confidence and expertise. The local authority is rightly scaling down its level of support as the school becomes less reliant on external guidance. Increasingly, leaders and governors can draw upon their own expertise within the school, the federation and other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector