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15 May 2017

Mrs Bolton  
St Gabriel's Roman Catholic Primary School, Rochdale  
Vicarage Road South  
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Rochdale  
Lancashire  
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Dear Mrs Bolton

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gabriel's Roman Catholic Primary School, Rochdale**

Following my visit to your school on 27 April 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 June 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 June 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen leaders' planning and reviews of pupils' learning about different cultures
- make sure that teachers fully challenge the most able pupils to develop their skills and knowledge.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other leaders, a representative of the local authority and three members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed your plans for improvement and your monitoring of the work of staff. With you, I toured the school to observe

learning in classes and talk to pupils about their work. I met with some staff to hear about improvements in the school.

## **Context**

Since the inspection a new deputy headteacher has joined the school. The assistant headteacher was appointed from within the existing staff team in April 2017. One teacher has returned to the school after an extended leave of absence. Two parent governors and an associate governor are new to the school.

## **Main findings**

Staff, leaders and governors are committed to improving the school. They fully accept that the judgements of the previous inspection were fair and accurate. They are using the inspection findings to challenge themselves about the quality of their work and to improve leadership and teaching. Teachers and teaching assistants know the key issues facing the school and the crucial importance of improving the quality of education that the school provides.

The new senior leadership team is working well together to lead and review the work of staff. Arrangements to set and monitor targets for the work of teachers are improving strongly. Senior leaders have an increasingly clear and well-informed understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in each class. They are using checks on the work of staff more precisely to plan the support and challenge given to individual teachers and teaching assistants.

Following training about their role, middle leaders are now given good opportunities to review work in their subjects. They share their evaluation of progress with senior leaders and governors through 'leadership impact reports'. Already, there is a shared feeling of responsibility between leaders in the school. Staff morale is rising quickly because of the improved support and help leaders now give to staff. Information about key issues for improvement is being shared quickly and fully with staff. Staff say they feel supported and valued. A typical staff comment is, 'It's great to work here now because this is a school that knows where it is going.'

You now deploy teaching assistants successfully as part of the teaching team. Staff have undertaken extensive training since the inspection so that they are more skilled in supporting pupils' learning. Staff with whom I spoke say you acted quickly after the previous inspection to strengthen and develop their work. They find the regular assistance of the new deputy headteacher to be of great value to their work.

As a result of increased training, advice and support, the quality of learning in the school is improving. For example, pupils are being given many opportunities to demonstrate their improved writing skills by undertaking longer pieces of independent work. Teachers use the walls of classrooms and corridors extensively

to celebrate positive examples of pupils' writing about a wide range of interesting topics.

Teaching is becoming more engaging and interesting because the staff's assessment and tracking of pupils' learning is much improved. Teachers, teaching assistants and leaders benefit from the increased detail to review pupils' progress. Planned activities are starting to build well on previous learning. In mathematics, pupils who grasp concepts quickly are being given valuable additional opportunities to deepen and widen their understanding. Pupils say they are learning to think, reason and solve complex problems alone and with their peers. However, in English the writing skills of the most able pupils are not always stretched fully in activities. Across subjects, teachers give pupils feedback in line with school policy and they are clear about how they can improve their work. You have rightly identified that teaching in a few classes remains less successful. You have acted quickly and thoroughly to provide relevant staff with extra support. Clear plans are being followed to continue to raise the quality of staff work this term.

The early years provision remains a strength of the school. Children are excited about learning. For example, they enjoyed finding out about the growth of plants and using magnifying glasses to look at a dead bumblebee. The Reception classroom is inviting, well arranged and used successfully to extend children's learning.

Governors are making sure that their effective work, identified at the time of the previous inspection, continues to help the school to move forward. They are making increasing checks on the work of staff and leaders. They consider carefully the feedback and challenge given by the local authority about the pace and impact of recent improvements. Governors are pleased with the progress that you have made in the last 10 months to move the school forward. They are clear what more remains to be achieved.

Recently, you identified that to strengthen the impact of the school's work on pupils' learning, a review of pupil premium strategy and expenditure was required. This has now been completed and the externally commissioned report is awaited. You recognise the importance of making sure that disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, achieve well at St Gabriel's. You are currently planning how this aspect of the school's work will be improved so that the differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils diminish further.

Teaching of pupils about a wide range of other faiths and beliefs is now included more fully and successfully in pupils' learning, particularly in religious education lessons. There are also week-long celebrations about other faiths. However, pupils are not learning to understand the culture of Britain and Europe in detail. The planning and review of this aspect of the school's work by leaders is not carried out well.

The school's improvement plan is structured clearly and identifies the range of actions leaders are taking to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Plans are linked to existing school priorities and to other aspects that your self-evaluation identifies as requiring attention so the school becomes good. Plans set out clear, measurable priorities for staff and leaders.

### **External support**

You are making good use of the support and advice available through the local authority and from your links with other local schools. Through frequent discussion and debate, senior leaders and staff benefit from the helpful advice provided. Together you have a clear and shared understanding of the point which the school has reached on its journey to becoming good. You have made good use of external help to review the use of the pupil premium funding and are increasing your focus on this aspect of the school. For you as headteacher, the increased support for your own planning and reviews of the school are helping you to identify and pursue improvements with more skill and confidence. You have acted thoughtfully in commissioning extra assistance from independent consultants. This support is improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning and helping staff and leaders to develop and use the skills necessary to move the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**