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24 May 2017

Gail Neill
Holy Cross Catholic Primary School
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Dear Ms Neill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 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 May 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 May 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:

- ensure that governors are provided with information regarding the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able, not just for pupils overall
- publish details on the school's website to show parents and visitors how you and your staff are spending this year's pupil premium funding
- improve teaching so that there is sufficient challenge for the most able across all year groups
- monitor more precisely the punctuality of those pupils who arrive late for school and implement more effective action to ensure that they arrive promptly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your subject leaders for English and mathematics, 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. I evaluated the school improvement plan and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. I looked at monitoring reports from subject leaders. I also toured the school with you to see lessons taking place in all classes for pupils of compulsory school age.

Context

The school received a warning notice shortly after the inspection of May 2016 due to pupils' low standards. In September 2016, you began at Holy Cross as interim headteacher. The governing body appointed you as the substantive headteacher in February 2017. The chair of governors began his role in September 2016. There have also been some instabilities in staffing over the past year. However, you have ensured that a full complement of teachers will be in place from the start of next term.

Main findings

You and your staff have written a comprehensive action plan to deal with all the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. The monitoring reports that I looked at during my visit show that the governing body, and the local authority, are checking each term that each action is taking place as required, and that it is having the result intended. Like you, governors are ambitious for the school, not only to be a good one as quickly as possible, but for Holy Cross Primary School to offer an outstanding education for every pupil.

Upon your arrival, you found that the teachers were using a number of different systems to track the achievement of pupils. This was resulting in a confused overall view of their outcomes. Matters were compounded by considerable inaccuracies in teachers' judgements in reading, writing and mathematics. With your staff, you agreed a single system to record pupils' progress. At the same time, you set about ensuring that all teachers received good training to be able to assess what each pupil could do. This included arranging for teachers to visit other local schools to improve their skills. As a result, they now feel confident in being able to judge and record whether pupils are learning well. The school's system shows that, in almost all year groups, a clear overall majority of pupils are on track to attain at least the standards expected for their age by the end of the term, with a considerable proportion attaining a greater depth of understanding. As the tracking system is still in its early stages, it will not be able to show the proportions of pupils making the progress expected of them until the end of the year. However, books that I looked at during my visit show the improving progress of pupils in different years in both key stages.

There are a small number of year groups where children's overall attainment is not high enough. However, you are aware of where this is the case, and are ensuring that staff are taking action to support these pupils to learn faster, and to catch up. Though you are now supplying governors with very useful and accurate information about pupils overall, you have not yet given them specific information regarding, for example, the disadvantaged pupils and the most able. As a result, governors are not yet able to hold you to account effectively for the progress of all different groups.

Published information about pupils' performance in 2016 provided a mixed picture. Pupils' progress in key stage 2 was in line with the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. In key stage 1, progress in reading and writing were average, but pupils did not do as well in mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was well below average.

You have appointed new subject leaders for English and mathematics to help you improve teaching. Although these leaders are not yet experienced in their roles, they are becoming increasingly effective. As well as helping other staff to focus on areas where pupils do not yet have secure skills, they are now providing the governing body with clear information about what is working well, and what they and their colleagues need to do next.

Teaching is improving. You and your staff have introduced a new behaviour policy that sets out clear expectations for pupils' conduct. Pupils I met with told me that everyone now knew what was expected of them, and that teachers would not tolerate misbehaviour. They also explained how staff notice, celebrate and reward pupils who pay attention and work hard. As a result, they said, pupils' behaviour has improved considerably. This was confirmed during my tour of classrooms. I saw pupils learning effectively, trying their best, paying attention and cooperating well. Pupils also explained to me how, if they do not understand something, or get something wrong, staff will quickly put this right, so they do not continue to make the same mistake. Pupils also told me how teachers are encouraging them to become more independent, and to keep going, even if their work is hard. Pupils do not mind making occasional errors, and are receiving increasingly clear guidance on knowing how to improve through their targets.

Pupils' workbooks show that their rate of progress is improving. In mathematics, pupils are understanding how to use number more fluently and to reason mathematically with greater confidence. In English, their writing is becoming more assured and their vocabulary is becoming wider, with words that are more ambitious. For example, pupils in Year 5 were using phrases such as 'a raging controversy' in their writing. However, although there is early evidence of more challenge for the most able pupils, this is not yet consistent. Too often, teachers give these pupils identical, or near-identical, work to others.

Teachers I met told me that the school is improving quickly. As one explained to me, 'It is like a different place – everyone is so much clearer in their role.' They explained that staff feel valued and listened to, and that you strongly encourage all staff, regardless of their role, to contribute their thoughts and views. Parents I met during my visit also felt that the school has become a much more welcoming place. As well as organising workshops on aspects such as phonics and mathematics, you and your staff are inviting parents in regularly during the school day to see their children learning. In addition, staff are giving parents more information on how to help their children learn at home.

You have ensured that your early years leader is improving communications with local pre-school settings. Regular meetings with staff from these settings have allowed purposeful and productive professional discussions to take place, and for your staff to give ideas to staff from the pre-schools about how to promote pupils' early phonics skills.

The school website now meets almost all requirements on the publication of specified information. However, you have not yet published details on how you are spending this year's pupil premium funding to improve attainment for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged. You are currently completing this, so that you can give parents a clear overview of how you are overcoming any barriers to learning that these pupils face.

Although pupils' attendance remains below the national average, you are working hard to improve this. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is beginning to fall. You are helping all pupils and their families understand the importance of coming to school regularly, and celebrating those pupils whose attendance is high. In addition, the inclusion manager is working well with the families whose children do not attend regularly enough. You are aware, however, that too many pupils are still late for school. Although you are noting the numbers of these pupils, you are not currently tracking patterns of lateness effectively enough. As a result, you cannot measure whether your work is being effective, nor take additional action to improve punctuality where it is needed.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided extensive support that you, senior leaders, staff and governors have found very valuable. As well as helping you and your staff to write a clear school improvement plan, officers have visited the school to undertake regular visits to classrooms to see learning taking place and examined pupils' books with you to check pupils' achievement. You have facilitated the training of staff in assessing their pupils accurately. The local authority also supported the governing

body through the appointment process of the headteacher. The adviser is fully committed to ensuring that appropriate support from the local authority continues so that the school improves further.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector