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Mrs Rachel Davidson
Headteacher
Holy Family Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Davidson

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

Following my visit to your school on 9 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 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 not 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 urgent and decisive action to:

- develop plans which set clear, measurable targets linked to pupils' performance so that governors, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff are in no doubt what pupils must achieve
- use these clear, measurable targets to hold senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff to account for pupils' performance
- eradicate weak teaching so that pupils across the school make rapid progress to catch up to their peers with similar starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the mathematics lead teacher and a group of teachers. I also met with the chair of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. During the day, I visited a number of classes to observe pupils at work and to look at their books. I met formally with a group of key stage 2 pupils to discuss their work. I evaluated your action plan and considered other evidence, including your most recent pupil performance data.

Context

There have been a number of changes since the inspection. The previous headteacher retired at the end of the summer term 2016. A number of teaching staff have also left the school. You took up post in September 2016. Currently, a third of teachers are on temporary contracts. The two teachers in the Reception classes are new to early years: one is a newly qualified teacher and the other is in her second year of teaching.

A number of governors have resigned. The new chair and vice-chair of governors were appointed in January 2017.

Main findings

The school is not tackling the weaknesses identified by the inspection team urgently enough. The quality of teaching is not consistently good and too many pupils continue to make slower progress than that of which they are capable.

We talked about the challenges you have faced since taking up your post. You have been frustrated by the constant 'fire-fighting' which has hampered the progress of your plans. Staffing turbulence has exacerbated the challenge of improving the quality of teaching. You are now pressing ahead with a staffing review to secure a sustainable, stable staffing structure which you anticipate will help the school to achieve its goals.

From the start, you recognised the negative impact of the challenging behaviour presented by a small but significant minority of pupils. You have implemented a new, whole-school approach to behaviour management. However, you know that, as with other aspects of the school's work, this approach is not applied consistently across the school by all members of staff. Therefore, it is not as successful as it could be.

Inconsistency is a key challenge for you. Whether it is the use of questioning, application of the marking policy, or use of pupils' previous learning to plan lessons, practice is inconsistent across the school. Too many teachers do not follow the school's agreed policies and procedures every day.

The external review of governance commissioned by the governing body has been a catalyst for change. A number of governors took the opportunity to stand down. The archdiocese helped you appoint new governors, including the chair of governors, with the wealth of experience and expertise required. The new chair has made sure that governors are in no doubt about what is expected of them. He has set up committees so that governors can keep a closer eye on all aspects of the school's performance. The chair is determined that the governing body will provide the high-quality support and challenge needed to secure rapid improvements in the school's performance. However, it is too early to evaluate any impact of this reinvigorated approach to governance.

Across the school, pupils' outcomes continue to be too low. You recognise that senior leaders have not made the necessary improvements to early years provision. There are too many missed opportunities to develop children's skills and knowledge, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, to help them to reach a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Quite rightly, you are concerned that pupils in key stage 1 are falling even further behind. Despite the training and support you have put in place, some teachers in key stage 1 are still not planning and delivering lessons which help pupils catch up quickly. You talked to me about the challenge for upper key stage 2 teachers to plug gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Despite more girls now working at the standard expected for their age, other groups lag behind. This academic underperformance presents a real challenge for your pupils as they move on to high school.

You have valued the intensive support and training put in place by the local authority. For some of your teaching staff, this support and training is making a positive difference. Your mathematics lead teacher has flourished. She has made a positive impact on the quality of teaching in mathematics, particularly for your oldest pupils. These pupils talked to me about how much they enjoy mathematics lessons now. However, you are concerned that too much of this local authority support and challenge has been directed to where it has the least effect. This means that other staff who have the potential to improve miss out.

Both you and your local authority colleagues agree that any improvements in the quality of teaching have not been embedded across the school. You have used evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books, as well as pupil performance data, to help you to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. The recent local authority review captured the characteristics of the strongest and weakest teaching at Holy Family, which corroborated your view. You talked to me about your plans to develop a set of principles for teaching which will be non-negotiable at Holy Family so that teachers are in no doubt about what you expect. You are well aware that weak teaching is hindering your pupils' chances of academic success. You understand that this issue requires urgent and decisive action so that all your pupils make the strong progress of which they are capable.

Although you collect data on pupils' performance, this is not used to set ambitious targets that will help your pupils to catch up with their peers nationally. Moreover, you are not tracking pupils' progress closely enough and making sure the different cohorts, groups and individuals achieve as well as they should. Furthermore, your school's post-Ofsted plan does not align actions to their expected impact on pupils' progress and attainment. Consequently, no one is held sufficiently and robustly to account for pupils' outcomes.

External support

You have been well supported by the local authority since the inspection. The local authority has provided a balance of challenge and support. The project board has held school leaders to account, while members of the school improvement team have provided coaching for leaders, including the mathematics subject lead, training for teaching staff and one-to-one support. However, as the local authority's recent review confirmed, this support has had limited impact, particularly in those areas in greatest need of improvement.

The Archdiocese of Liverpool have helped to find new governors with the appropriate skills, experience and expertise to provide effective strategic leadership for the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector