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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Andrew Henstridge
Executive Headteacher
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Swindon
Davenwood
Upper Stratton
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN2 7LL

Dear Mr Henstridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Swindon

Following my visit to your school on 27 November 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 November 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 November 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' writing skills, particularly in Year 2 and Year 6
- increase the number of pupils achieving greater depth in all their subjects, particularly in Year 4 and Year 6.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, the chair of governors, the school improvement partner and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, alongside the school's self-evaluation, progress information and reports from the

school improvement partner. In addition, I undertook a learning walk with you to observe pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.

Context

Four new teachers were appointed in September 2017. Two of these teachers are newly qualified. There have also been changes to the governing body since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Senior leaders take an open, honest approach to the school's weaknesses. This means that they are able to meet challenges head-on in a purposeful and direct way. Leaders and governors are not shying away from the challenges at hand; they are focused on implementing lasting, sustainable improvements. Leadership is strengthening because leaders are now held to greater account by governors. In turn, leaders are holding the wider staff to greater account, while correspondingly providing support to nurture their development.

Governors now have greater clarity of purpose and understand their roles better. They are using pupils' progress information much more effectively than at the time of the previous inspection. They use this information to ask pertinent questions about pupils who are underachieving and the actions that leaders are taking to support them. Governors are becoming better at evaluating the success of leaders' actions. This is because they weigh what they are told against what is evident in classrooms, pupils' books and from speaking with staff.

Governors are becoming more skilled in their work because they are taking advantage of useful external training. For example, training has helped governors to undertake your performance management more effectively. Furthermore, new governors have been recruited who have specific skills and expertise, such as understanding performance data. They have filled gaps which, previously, hindered the governing body from being fully effective.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving because of more robust leadership. Leaders were swift to introduce a new assessment system in response to findings from the previous inspection. They have also ensured that the information from teachers that populates the system is accurate. Consequently, the school's assessment system is now fit for purpose. It provides ongoing, meaningful and accurate information that allows staff to monitor pupils' progress carefully and intervene where necessary to help pupils catch up.

Teaching is also improving because teachers are now routinely devising work and activities which meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Moreover, teachers are using themes and resources which spark pupils' interest. For example, during a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were observed considering problems as if they were detectives investigating a crime scene. Pupils enjoy their learning as a result.

Pupils also enjoy their learning because they benefit from positive relationships with their teachers. Teachers and teaching assistants go to lengths to help pupils, particularly lower-ability pupils, who struggle with their learning or get stuck. Pupils told me that they feel well supported in this regard. One pupil said that teachers, 'won't give you the answer but they show you how to get to the answer'. Pupils also said that they value teachers' efforts to create colourful, vibrant learning environments that help them with their learning.

Pupils behave well because of the teaching and support they receive. In lessons they listen attentively and focus on the task in hand. They enjoy participating in school life, both in and out of the classroom.

Improved teaching is helping pupils to make stronger progress across the school in different year groups. This is particularly apparent in the early years and Year 1. In 2017, the number of children achieving a good level of development was above average. This was also the case for the number of pupils achieving the expected standard in the national phonics screening check.

However, leaders acknowledge that there is more work to do to ensure that pupils' achievement in writing improves, particularly in Years 2 and 6. Currently, it does not match their achievement in reading and mathematics. Furthermore, leaders also acknowledge that more pupils across the school, particularly in Years 4 and 6, need to achieve at greater depth in all their subjects. Leaders have plans in place to overcome these barriers and recognise that these issues are a priority for the school.

External support

Leaders are being well supported by the school improvement partner, who has provided guidance and expertise to improve aspects of leadership and teaching. For example, he has provided training to governors about asking questions that challenge senior leaders effectively. The school is also benefiting from the partnership it has with a local school. You, as executive headteacher, lead both these schools and have successfully shared staff between the schools to meet need. Other networks of local schools and the local authority have also provided useful support, such as moderation activities. These activities have helped to make assessment more accurate and robust.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector