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Mr Mathew Byrne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Byrne

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

Following my visit to your school on 12 January 2018, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the clarity of actions set out in the school improvement plan further to address the recommendations made at the previous inspection
- make sure that pupils' progress in writing, reading and mathematics accelerates so that more achieve or exceed the standards expected for their age.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with a representative of the local authority and a local leader in education who is supporting the school. I reviewed the quality of school improvement plans. I jointly observed learning in a sample of classes with you and the assistant headteacher. I met with a sample of teaching staff and middle leaders.

Context

Since the inspection in 2016, two new teachers have joined the school, one in a leadership role for the early years. The governing body has recruited three new governors.

Main findings

Leaders, staff and governors were disappointed at the outcome of the previous inspection but were quick to accept that they have much more to do to improve the school. All who are involved at Holy Spirit demonstrate a fresh determination to lift the quality of education to become good once again. The work of the school is now heading in the right direction. The quality of teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour, governance and leadership are improving quickly. Even so, leaders and governors are clear about the serious situation that the school may find itself in if it is not judged to be good at the next inspection. They understand that nobody should reduce the pace and scale of change. They recognise that achievements in reading, writing and mathematics should continue to improve for all pupils.

Leaders are addressing the key issues facing the school. They understand how they are accountable for improvement. Leaders plan, review and support the work of staff more skilfully than in the past. They now compare the school's performance carefully against national standards. Leaders increasingly challenge themselves and staff about what they are doing to diminish the difference between the achievement of pupils at Holy Spirit and all pupils nationally.

Reviews by staff and leaders of pupils' progress are now more thorough. They use assessments to identify where they will improve support for the needs of individuals, as well as groups of pupils. Leaders and staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Staff now receive useful feedback from leaders about how to improve their teaching. They understand their own responsibilities for pupils' progress much better than in the past. Staff and leaders now learn from improved opportunities to link with teachers in other schools, as well as to learn with and from their colleagues at Holy Spirit.

Inspectors at the previous inspection recognised the positive contribution made by middle leaders to the work of the school. This improvement continues. Middle leaders review the quality of the work of staff in different subjects with increasing accuracy. They debate their findings more thoroughly with one another and share their insights more carefully with colleagues. Senior leaders have clear plans in place to enhance the impact of middle leaders on the quality of teaching and learning.

Governors have acted on the findings of an external review of governance commissioned promptly after the previous inspection. They now check what leaders tell them about the standards pupils achieve. They ask more challenging questions about improvement. Committees review specific aspects of education at the school in detail. Governors have an increasingly clear knowledge of the school, including of pupils' outcomes. In addition, they keep a close eye on meeting their own statutory responsibilities.

Leaders' plans for improvement set out clear priorities and link with other aspects they identify as requiring attention so that the school becomes good. Plans include measurable priorities for staff and leaders. However, leaders do not identify precisely enough all the actions they are taking to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Inspectors previously highlighted weaknesses in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement at the school. Pupils' subsequent attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics in national assessments in 2017 showed signs of improvement, but were not strong. Leaders and governors recognise that pupils' progress in each subject needs to accelerate, so that more achieve or exceed the standards expected for their age. Leaders are taking important steps to improve teaching and learning across classes. For example, they recently shared with staff their valuable insights into the successful work of other schools in the teaching of reading and mathematics. Staff now gain from a wide range of training and support. The quality of teaching and learning is improving throughout the school.

The teaching of mathematics is improving quickly. Staff are clearer about what to teach and how to deepen pupils' mathematical skills. Current pupils' achievement in mathematics in some year groups, for example in Year 2 and Year 3, is improving strongly. Leaders and staff understand that there is much more to achieve. For example, there is a need to assist older pupils to make up historical gaps in their mathematical skills and knowledge.

Pupils' reading skills, for example in Year 2 and Year 6, are improving well. This is because staff are now teaching pupils more skilfully to understand the sounds that letters make. Staff's teaching of reading across groups of pupils is becoming more consistent and successful. New reading resources are also helping to inspire pupils to want to read much more.

Provision in the Nursery class is becoming a new strength of the school. The curriculum is meaningful and relevant to children's needs. Staff place a strong emphasis on helping children to become confident, respectful and communicative. They work well as a team. They make thoughtful use of the much-improved outdoor area as part of planned activities for children. Leaders are starting to use information about children's achievement more precisely to identify where teaching should improve further.

School information shows that pupils begin their day at school more calmly than in the past. This improvement is due to changes in how staff help pupils to settle in classrooms before 9am. Pupils' behaviour is becoming more positive in lessons. Staff set clear expectations for pupils' conduct. Better teaching is making learning much more engaging and enjoyable for pupils.

Inspectors previously identified that pupils need to respect the differences between themselves and other people. Specific work to improve pupils' understanding of equality and diversity in modern Britain is beginning to bear fruit. For example, in the Nursery, children learn that families are often uniquely different from one another. Other school activities are beginning to develop pupils' understanding of what would be derogatory language about other people and communities. Displays in classrooms and corridors value different families and promote respect for diversity.

External support

You make good use of advice available through the local authority. The help from officers and consultants is, for example, helping to improve the quality of teaching of English and mathematics. Their support is raising staff confidence and morale, as well as their subject knowledge and teaching skills. Leaders now make better use of external advice to discuss and debate the quality of education at the school. The assistance from a local leader in education is improving leaders' skills, for example in how precisely senior leaders review the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders understand the need to continue to make full use of the expert help available to the school. The local authority intends to continue its support for staff and leaders in the crucial months ahead.

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 Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector