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12 March 2018

Mr Darren Mussell
St Anne's and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School
Sandy Lane
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Lancashire
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Dear Mr Mussell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Anne's and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School, Accrington

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- raise expectations of standards further so that pupils rapidly accelerate in their learning and all make the gains they are capable of
- review the assessment system so that leaders and governors can have a greater focus on accelerating the attainment of pupils in English and mathematics
- ensure that teachers use their assessment knowledge within the lesson to make quick adjustments to activities so they are sufficiently matched to pupils' learning needs and move them on in their learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the key stage and science leaders and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. We discussed the actions the school has taken since the last inspection. I also met with two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. You and I visited classrooms to observe pupils at work. I met with a group of 12 pupils to gain their views of the school and spoke to others informally. I observed pupils' behaviour around school and looked at some of their work in books. I evaluated your improvement plan and considered other evidence, including the monitoring of teaching and learning documentation, governing body minutes, information on safeguarding and related to behaviour.

Context

At the time of the last inspection in January 2017, staffing was unsettled either through illness or staff leaving the school. As a result, there were a number of temporary staff in post. Although this issue still remains in lower key stage 2, staffing is now much more stable elsewhere. As a result, school is more settled. There is currently an experienced acting deputy headteacher in post. Leaders are looking to appoint a new, permanent deputy headteacher in the next few weeks. The governing body has a number of new members, following the departure of some of the long-term governors.

Main findings

It was clear that you, your governors and the staff team were disappointed with the findings of the inspection in January 2017. However, because of you and your leadership team's determination and positive outlook you have set about making the changes needed to get the school back on track. As a result, you have now established a firm, consistent foundation on which to continue school improvement and accelerate pupils' learning.

You have a detailed and thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have used these well to plan appropriate, well-defined actions to address the areas of development identified at the last inspection. Your development plan is appropriately structured, with suitable timescales and indications of what success will look like. This shows that you clearly know what needs to happen to move the school forward. The implementation of your plans has been effective in bringing about swift improvements to the school, most notably in establishing a consistency in the minimum expectations of staff and pupils across the whole school and a continuity in the way teaching and learning is approached. As a result, pupils are receiving a much more consistent experience and standard of education.

The new governing body is very supportive of the school and is increasingly well informed as to the developments and improvements that are being made.

Governors are pleased to see all that has been achieved so far, but are not afraid to challenge and question leaders where the need arises. They, like you and senior leaders, can see that there is more still to be done. To this end, they are committed to make an important contribution to the school's continuing improvement journey.

A vital improvement since the previous inspection has been your commitment to developing your leadership team. With the restructure of the senior leadership team you have enabled a much greater accountability for school improvement across the school. These leaders have risen to this role with enthusiasm and confidence and are having a valuable influence on the changes that are increasingly evident throughout school.

You have successfully set up a system for the regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. You have been conscientious in keeping to this timetable and consequently you and your senior leadership team are often in classrooms observing lessons, looking at the quality of pupils' work, talking to teachers about pupils' progress, including next steps, and to pupils about their learning. The impact of this work is very evident in the improvements in the consistency of approach across the school. For example, you were asked to improve the quality of the way pupils presented their work in books. According to the school's policy, all pupils' books set out their activities and their intended learning in the same way. They use similar ways to evaluate their tasks and to respond to teachers' comments. Pupils are clearly taking a pride in their work and teachers are equally insistent in their high expectations.

With a more stable staff you have been able to insist on a greater consistency of expectations in teaching approach. For example, you have decided that all classroom environments should have the same emphasis on reading, writing, mathematics and developing pupils' skills to be resilient learners. All classrooms are resourced to an equally good standard. Adults have very positive, friendly and supportive relationships with pupils. Year group teachers plan together and support each other in ensuring that pupils are getting a similar quality of experience and lesson content.

Parents and pupils say they have noticed the improvements that have been made in the school recently. Pupils say that work is 'better now because it is harder and a bit more challenging'. They like being encouraged to be more independent in their learning. They were keen to share with me ways of asking for help and support, such as looking on the board or asking a buddy, before asking the teacher. The majority of parents said communication between school and home has improved. They are pleased that the school staff appear to be more settled and their children are having the same teacher for the whole year. However, some parents did feel that their children were still not making as much progress as they could.

Teachers work hard to provide activities that are interesting and engaging for pupils. Pupils visibly enjoy their learning and have a positive attitude to their work and the adults that help them to learn. The low-level disruption evident at the previous inspection has been successfully addressed. There is a consistent standard and expectations of behaviour. Pupils were part of reviewing the school's behaviour policy and are very clear about what good behaviour is. They say that inappropriate behaviour is rare and most of the time their peers are well-behaved in the classroom and around school.

There have been some improvements in pupils' progress but not enough. Now the school is more settled and consistent foundations have been laid, you are aware that you need to rapidly raise expectations of standards further so that pupils accelerate in their learning and all make the gains they are capable of.

The school's assessment system is effective in tracking pupils' progress, but less so at tracking pupils' attainment. As a result, leaders, governors and teachers are not keeping an equivalent eye on increasing attainment. I agree with you that if progress is improving in English and mathematics, then so should attainment. However, it is evident that this is not the case at present.

Teachers use the assessment information they have to plan work that broadly meets the needs of pupils. Activities are available to challenge the most able pupils. However, pupils are still not making the progress that they could because teachers are not using their assessment knowledge sufficiently within a lesson. They are not making quick enough adjustments to activities so they are sufficiently matched to pupils' learning needs and moving them on in their learning. This includes the most able, but not exclusively.

The development of phonics has been very effective. Children are taught in a fun, well-structured way in Reception which is systematically built upon through Year 1. Reception and key stage 1 staff have a good subject knowledge and their approach with pupils is self-assured. There is a sense that adults are not leaving anything to chance when it comes to pupils developing their phonics and reading skills. As a result, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the national screening check for phonics at the end of Year 1 is rising. In 2017, results were comparable to that expected of pupils nationally.

The strong and enthusiastic leadership of the science curriculum has ensured that the teaching of the subject across the school has been invigorated. Both adults and pupils love the 'wow science' activities that stimulate pupils' curiosity and get them to think and ask questions. Your curriculum leader admits there is still more to do, but a very good start has been made.

External support

The local authority has provided effective and well-tailored support for you. They have also secured the support of a strong headteacher from another local school. You are making the most of all the support available. You and your leadership team say that you have found the advice and opportunity to work with the staff of other schools to be invaluable. Regular meetings with a local authority representative are helpful in identifying next steps and ensuring that you are receiving the right support at the right time. The diocese has been supportive to school, particularly in appointing effective, enthusiastic and knowledgeable new governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector