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Mrs Heather McGowan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McGowan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Antony's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 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 three 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:

- build upon the effective actions taken to improve leadership to further enhance the skills of leaders in evaluating the impact of their actions to improve the school
- augment the information about the curriculum published on the school's website so it better reflects the depth of what is taught in school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and a group of leaders with responsibility for subjects other than English and mathematics. I met with two representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body,

and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with the deputy director of education of the Diocese of Salford. I evaluated the school action plan and I visited all classrooms to see learning and progress in action. I examined pupils' work in books and information about pupils' attendance, attainment and progress. I also evaluated the effectiveness of your actions to safeguard pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection, three members of staff, including a teacher temporarily working in school, have been dismissed due to issues related to their suitability to work with children. Additionally, three other teachers have left the school. There has been some long-term staff absence that has now been addressed.

Main findings

Following the last inspection, leaders have worked diligently to bring about improvements to the quality of teaching and leadership of the school. As a result, pupils now receive a better standard of education.

The school's policies and procedures for the safeguarding pupils are fit for purpose and of high quality. All required checks on the suitability of staff are carried out prior to them working in school. Safeguarding records are kept meticulously. Staff, including those in the school office, who are the first point of contact with the school, are vigilant and well trained. Leaders act swiftly and appropriately to deal with any concerns relating to safeguarding. Leaders share information with appropriate authorities to ensure the safety of pupils.

Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of their improved systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their work. Well-constructed development plans identify the correct improvement priorities. However, on some occasions, the clarity of the expected outcomes for some actions is limited. This means that leaders, including governors, are less able to evaluate if the actions are having the desired effect on improving the school.

Leaders' high expectations have been shared with all staff. Leaders have introduced effective performance management systems that hold teachers and teaching assistants more closely to account for the quality of their work. Leaders do not hesitate to take the appropriate action to address any underperformance that they identify.

Leaders have also improved the quality of teaching through appropriate training for staff. This includes providing staff with opportunities to visit other schools to learn from good and outstanding practice. Teachers have increased their participation in, and on occasions their leadership of, training events that involve a cluster of other

local schools. This has ensured that they have improved their knowledge and understanding of the most effective strategies to support the teaching of mathematics and writing. Leaders, too, have improved the resources available to teachers to support pupils' learning and progress in writing and mathematics. This includes the implementation of a new scheme of work to promote the development of spelling and the correct use of English grammar.

In the 2017 key stage 2 national assessments, pupils made progress in line with national averages in reading, mathematics and writing. This was a slight decline compared to the previous year. However, there were specific and justifiable reasons for this. Leaders' effective use of the pupil premium funding ensured that disadvantaged pupils made better progress than their peers in school and similar progress to other pupils nationally in end-of-key-stage national assessments. Work in pupils' books and school-based information show that this much stronger progress is being sustained and improved upon.

Work in pupils' books and the information in the improved school-based assessment tracking system show that leaders' actions are having the desired effect. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making strong progress from their starting points in nearly all year groups. The better use of assessment information by teachers to inform their planning ensures that, in nearly all year groups, the work set for pupils is closely matched to their abilities. Teachers' heightened expectations of what pupils can achieve ensure that pupils receive the challenge that they deserve from an interesting and rich curriculum. For example, in mathematics pupils are frequently required to apply their skills to solve problems and then explain and demonstrate their methods and the reasons for their answers in class discussions.

In addition, teachers' improved subject knowledge means that they make better use of links between different subjects to promote learning. For example, in key stage 1 teachers make creative links between a wide range of subjects, including English, history and dance, to enthral pupils in a range of activities such as the study of castles. These activities effectively promote pupils' development of knowledge and understanding at greater depth. Pupils are interested in their lessons and, as a result, demonstrate improved attitudes to learning. There is, however, one year group where improvement has not been as strong. Senior leaders are aware of this and are taking appropriate actions to address it.

Leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics has improved because of the additional training and support, including the completion of middle-leadership training provided by a neighbouring local authority. Subject leaders now have a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the subjects for which they are responsible. This is because of their more frequent and better-focused monitoring of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in their subjects. Most subject leaders regularly evaluate pupils' work and teachers' planning. Subject

leaders make good use of 'subject ambassadors'. These are pupils from each year group with particular interests in a subject. They contribute to subject evaluations and help to run training and parent information events.

Governors are also well informed about the quality of teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics. This is because of improved reporting procedures and more frequent opportunities for governors to question subject leaders about the impact of their actions to improve teaching and learning. However, senior leaders recognise that their work in developing subject leadership is not complete, particularly relating to the strengthening of how well subject leaders evaluate the impact of their actions during the year. For example, by using sharply focused measurable criteria to check how well their actions are improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in their subject.

Leaders recognise the importance of frequent and punctual attendance at school in ensuring that pupils progress in their learning. School leaders appropriately challenge parents who do not ensure that they get their children to school on time or often enough. Leaders also effectively promote good attendance within school using a variety of strategies that celebrate good attendance. Leaders and staff frequently go beyond that which is expected to help those families who find it difficult to get their children to school. As a result, the majority of pupils who are persistently absent are improving their attendance. However, despite the school's best efforts, some parents do not ensure that their children attend regularly enough.

The quality of provision for physical education (PE), and participation in sport, is improving. Well-considered recruitment has ensured that a greater number of teachers have specialist knowledge of PE. For example, some have qualifications in coaching of gymnastics and dance. Training by school staff, and others with specialist qualifications, promotes teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding of the most effective strategies to teach PE. Additionally, the effective use of sports premium allows the subject leader to work alongside teachers in class to improve their skills and confidence in teaching PE. Opportunities for pupils to participate in sporting activities have improved greatly. This is because of the commitment of staff, and leaders' actions, to increase the school's participation in competitive and taster sporting events. After-school clubs for sport now run four days a week and they include football clubs for girls and boys. They also include separate gymnastics clubs and dance clubs for key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils. As a result, nearly half of the school's pupils now participate in an after-school sporting club or activity.

External support

The local authority and diocese have provided appropriate support and challenge for the school. This includes brokering additional and temporary support for leadership during the planned absence of the deputy headteacher. It also includes effective professional human resources advice relating to complex staffing issues. They

monitor the impact of the support that they provide carefully. The school has drawn effectively on the support provided to help it secure improvement to the quality of education it provides for pupils.

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 Blackburn and Darwen local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector