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Mrs Jenny Byrne
St Peter and St Paul Catholic Primary Academy and Nursery
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Dear Mrs Byrne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Peter and St Paul Catholic Primary Academy and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 19 April, 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the acting principal and the vice-principal, as well as the chair and other members of the governing body, known as the academy committee, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The director of the board of directors and the business director of the Bishop Cleary Catholic Multi Academy Company (BCC MAC) attended the meeting with academy board members. I also met with the school improvement adviser and the strategic lead for safeguarding for the BCC MAC. The school action plan was evaluated and other documents scrutinised, such as minutes of academy committee meetings,

assessment information, reading journals and reports from the school improvement adviser.

I visited lessons with you, the acting principal and the vice-principal and we discussed our observations. During the observations, I talked to pupils. I also looked at their work in books and classroom displays.

Context

At the time of the last inspection in March 2017, you had been in post for less than two terms. At the time of this visit, you were officially on maternity leave. Nevertheless, you came into school for the inspection. The acting principal is covering for three days a week and the vice-principal is acting as principal for two days a week. Two teachers have left the school and the assistant principal has retired. This post has since been removed from the structure.

Main findings

You, together with the vice-principal and acting principal, have put in place effective intervention and support to ensure that the school improves rapidly. With the support of the revitalised governing body, you have ensured that barriers to improvement have been removed. All staff now share consistently high expectations and leadership at all levels has improved.

Inconsistencies in teaching identified at the last inspection are being addressed effectively. Teachers benefit from an ongoing programme of professional development, which is beginning to make a difference to pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, standards at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 improved, particularly in mathematics.

At the end of key stage 1 in 2017, outcomes were in line with the national average in mathematics but remained below in reading and writing. Leaders have responded decisively. They have put in place intensive intervention and support to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in reading and writing.

Teachers have received training in how talk can support pupils with writing. This is helping to broaden pupils' vocabulary and improve the teaching of writing. Teachers now adapt tasks better to address the specific needs of learners, including those who speak English as an additional language. For example, in one lesson, pupils watched a video advertising the new rollercoaster at Alton Towers. Pupils then wrote their own persuasive texts about the attraction. One pupil used a metaphor to describe the ride as a monster. To hook the reader, another pupil used a rhetorical question: 'What are you waiting for? Come and join in the fun!'

Work in pupils' books and the school's current assessment information show that more pupils are now working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.

Extended homework projects provide opportunities for increased challenge for the most able pupils. Projects on display in classrooms demonstrate pupils' enthusiastic engagement with topics such as the Egyptians and World War II. Pupils produce complex models, posters or presentations on their chosen aspect of the topic.

Leaders acknowledge that outcomes in the early years were disappointing in 2017. Many children joining the Nursery and Reception classes speak English as an additional language. Despite having limited English skills, many pupils make good progress because teachers and other adults find innovative ways to support their language development. For example, Polish food packaging is displayed alongside English packaging so that children see familiar objects and make the links with English words.

Teachers' assessments are now more accurate. Teachers regularly compare their assessments with each other and with teachers from other schools. When the local authority moderated the teacher assessments in 2017 for the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, they commended teachers on the strong evidence provided to support judgements. As a result, one teacher was invited to act as a local authority moderator this year and the mathematics leader was asked to provide support for other schools.

Governors confirm that this external validation reinforces the confidence the academy committee and the multi-academy company have in teachers' assessment. It also demonstrates the impact of the support and challenge provided by leaders to bring about the necessary improvements.

There are now more opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their mathematical reasoning skills. The subject leader for mathematics has reviewed the curriculum and provides support for teachers to develop their subject knowledge. In a key stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were challenged to book a holiday abroad, sticking to a strict budget. They chose the accommodation based on the price per adult per night. They then added the price of the flights to their chosen destination and calculated the percentage increase in costs for all-inclusive or half-board options. Pupils articulated clearly how they made their calculations and why they had chosen that particular method.

Activities for children in the early years are increasingly well targeted and challenging. Support from local specialist teachers and a national leader of education has helped teachers and other adults to ask more effective questions that move children's learning on more rapidly. Children now have more opportunities to practise making marks with a variety of tools and equipment. This is helping them to develop their writing skills, but they still do not have enough opportunities to practise reading and forming their letters.

Across the school, many pupils are now making swift progress and more are on track to achieve the expected standard for their ages. Current assessment

information, pupils' work and lesson observations show that, on the whole, standards are improving. Some gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills remain as a result of previously weak teaching. However, leaders now track pupils' progress more effectively. They identify underperformance quickly and put in place training and support to close the gaps more rapidly.

Governance has been strengthened since the last inspection. An external review of governance was carried out promptly and an action plan put in place. Training records show that governors have attended a comprehensive range of training. New governors have been appointed, with the relevant skills needed. Governors now receive more detailed assessment information. This helps them to hold leaders to account more effectively. Minutes of academy committee meetings show evidence that governors are asking increasingly challenging questions. An academy member attends the strategic school improvement meetings, which are chaired by the school's improvement adviser.

External support

The school receives external funding for support from the Strategic School Improvement Fund, which is coordinated by the local teaching school alliance. The school also receives support for early years from an external specialist teacher and a national leader of education. The board of directors of the BCC MAC commissions additional school improvement support from Sandwell local authority. The school improvement adviser knows the school well. He acknowledges the improvements that have been made so far and has correctly identified where further work is still needed. Leaders and teachers appreciate and embrace the support. They are pleased that their hard work is improving outcomes for pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the director of the BCC MAC board of directors and the director of education for the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury

Her Majesty's Inspector