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Mr Damien Thorpe
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Dear Mr Thorpe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in November 2017, 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 for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that disadvantaged pupils make swift progress to enable them to achieve as well as others
- provide appropriate support to pupils and their families to quickly reduce persistent absence.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held a telephone

conversation with the chair of the governing body and the local authority school evaluation officer. I met with the director of primary schools for the Diocese of Hallam and spoke to several pupils in classrooms and at lunchtime. I considered your assessment information and looked at pupils' work in books.

Context

Three staff left the school last year. Up to July 2018, one class was taught by you and the head of school, and one class was taught by a supply teacher. Despite initial recruitment difficulties, all posts have now been filled by experienced teachers. Leaders feel that staffing is now 'much stronger than it has ever been'.

There have been changes in governance. Two parent governors have recently joined the school and three foundation governors have stepped down. The governing body has recently restructured so that each school in the federation has its own local governing committee, to ensure greater accountability and knowledge locally.

Main findings

Supported by a national leader of education and a local leader of education, you have worked successfully to develop middle and senior leadership within the school. You submitted a bid for external funding to support leadership development across the federation. The focus of this development has been on improving the ability of leaders to accurately monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching taking place. Supported by a local leader of education, you and your head of school have ensured greater rigour in the use of assessment information and have injected a greater level of challenge into meetings with teachers. Additional checking by the local authority shows that you are now more effective in holding teachers to account for the progress pupils are making.

Leaders have been more robust in managing the performance of teachers who have not delivered consistently good-quality teaching in the past. You have eradicated inadequate teaching, and your monitoring shows that much more teaching is better matched to the needs of pupils. Leaders and teachers have worked effectively alongside others in the federation to ensure precise assessment of pupils' work. Consequently, key stage 1 outcomes, checked by the local authority this year, were found to be accurately assessed.

Standards are steadily improving across the school. In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception, and the proportion who passed the Year 1 phonics screening check, was broadly in line with the national average figures. Key stage 1 pupils made good progress from low starting points in early years. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 was broadly in line with the national average. Teachers have been more successful in challenging the most able pupils, so that more pupils attained the higher standard in 2018 than in previous years. Each of these indicators represents an improvement from 2017.

At the end of key stage 2 in 2018, more pupils attained expected standards than in the past. Teachers' planning to meet the needs of the most able pupils proved more successful in reading and writing than in mathematics, illustrated by an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard in these subjects. However, at the end of Year 6 overall, pupils' progress was below average in reading and mathematics and the progress of disadvantaged pupils was particularly weak.

Leaders have recently supported teachers in devising more appropriate individual learning plans and the head of school has been checking that what is planned is taught. I observed teachers and teaching assistants providing skilful support for those pupils who have education, health and care plans, enabling them to learn alongside their peers. However, leaders understand that there is still more work to do to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers.

Pupils' books show that teachers are beginning to achieve consistency in the teaching of writing. Middle leaders for literacy have been effective in checking teachers' planning and supporting them to plan sequences of learning that enable pupils to use the skills they are learning successfully in their writing. Pupils were observed using their 'editing suite' of resources to help them check on their use of grammar and punctuation and improve their writing.

Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils' progress in reading keeps up with that seen nationally. They have analysed the gaps in pupils' learning and have put into place appropriate plans to develop the teaching of reading further.

Following analysis of pupils' strengths, leaders found pupils to be fluent in number but less capable of thinking more deeply about mathematics. Consequently, leaders introduced a whole-school approach to teaching mathematics that has led to greater consistency in the way pupils learn. Pupils' books show that teachers are now challenging their pupils appropriately and developing their ability to reason about mathematics.

Leaders have ensured that records and paperwork relating to safeguarding are appropriately kept and regularly checked by the chair of governors. The inspector saw evidence that leaders have contacted the local authority designated officer when appropriate and that procedures for dealing with complaints have been meticulously applied. Leaders' efforts to improve pupils' attendance have faltered, and although attendance overall is broadly in line with the national average figure, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has risen and is now twice the national average. The school's figures show that girls are more likely to be regularly absent than boys.

External support

Effective support for Sacred Heart has come from a range of sources, brokered by both the local authority and the teaching school alliance. A local leader for education has supported middle leaders in developing successful approaches to writing. They are continuing this work into further developing the teaching of reading. A local leader of education has been instrumental in guiding senior leaders to improve the rigour of monitoring and to evaluate learning more accurately. The diocese and local authority have stepped up the level of challenge to leaders and have robustly held them to account, leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. A representative of the diocese has been a constant presence at governing body meetings, working successfully alongside the national leader of governance to improve levels of accountability.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher
Her Majesty's Inspector