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28 November 2013

Mrs Catherine Monaghan
Headteacher
St Paul's Roman Catholic Primary School,
Preston Old Road
Feniscowles
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB2 5EP

Dear Mrs Monaghan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Paul's Roman Catholic Primary School, Feniscowles, Blackburn, Blackburn with Darwen

Following my visit to your school on 27 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you and Ms Keen (acting headteacher during your maternity leave) 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- engage with other schools to observe outstanding teaching practice to enable the quality of teaching and learning to develop at a faster pace
- ensure teachers are fully involved in the monitoring and review processes to encourage greater consistency across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the acting headteacher, other school leaders, pupils, the Chair and five other members of the Governing Body and the school improvement officer from the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the

last inspection. I evaluated the school action plans; the school's system for tracking pupils' attainment and progress; the assessment summary for 2012-13 and the monitoring of progress made since the previous inspection. I met with six pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 to talk about recent changes in the school and look at examples of their work. Ms Keen and I visited each classroom to meet pupils and staff and look at the improvements to teaching put in place since the last inspection.

Main findings

You, the governors and staff are determined to ensure the school is good. The action plan focuses clearly on the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection and there are weekly monitoring meetings run by senior leaders, governors and the school improvement officer, to review progress and amend some of the actions as necessary. This has enabled the senior leaders and governors to ensure progress is swift, effective and sustained. As a consequence of these meetings you are able to demonstrate the impact of the changes, that have been introduced to tackle each of the areas requiring improvement, and plan for further developments.

You have improved the leadership and management of the school by: implementing a new pay policy and appraisal structure; reorganising the staffing structure; and appointing an assistant headteacher to lead on monitoring and analysing attainment and progress. Staff have been consulted regarding their roles and the school's expectations. Staff are more aware of their responsibilities and accountability. The role of the learning assistants has been a focus for development: as a result they do less administration and have more responsibility for supporting pupils' learning in the classroom. A more effective system for them sharing information about pupils' progress with teachers is in place, however, you have yet to review the quality of this information across the school and its impact on teachers' planning. Teachers have set reading, writing and mathematics termly targets for their pupils and, after discussing progress with their learning assistants, will meet with senior leaders to ensure appropriate interventions are put in place to support pupils. The governing body has formed committees to monitor teaching and learning and pupil progress, and have set up a staff /governor forum to seek staff views on school development so they can effectively monitor the impact of the action plan.

The assessment process has been completely overhauled and allows staff much more responsibility and ownership of setting and monitoring challenging targets for pupils in their classes so pupils have greater opportunity to reach their potential. However, assessment on entry to the school is not yet shared sufficiently to enable progress at each key stage to be measured accurately and be aspirational. Pupils are aware of their targets and what needs to be worked on to achieve their targets and as a result have a clearer focus for improvement. Pupils want to develop their communication and mathematics skills through activities that are more creative: for example fully utilising the potential of the garden area to enrich all areas of the curriculum and relate learning to relevant life skills.

You have introduced 'fixit' time every morning to give pupils the opportunity to correct and edit their work in response to teachers' comments. This has been well received by the pupils who enjoy the opportunity to work independently and make decisions about their next steps: for example, whether to extend their reading or take up a challenge. I observed pupils during 'fixit' time and they were all engaged in their work and able to get on independently or had time to access extra support. Pupils told me they liked learning from their mistakes and that they think teachers are working hard to prepare them for achieving good results to help them when they move to their next school.

Teachers have been encouraged to extend the opportunities for pupils to put their learning into practice through problem solving and pupils say they like the relevance this brings to their learning, however, these opportunities are not being offered consistently across the school. The 'challenge boxes' were also evaluated by the pupils and these need to be reviewed by staff to ensure they are sufficiently accessible and varied to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes.

Staff have become more proactive in taking responsibility and offering ideas to move the school forward. They have done all that the senior leaders have asked of them and responded positively to the raised expectations of the leadership team. Opportunities to engage with other schools to share and celebrate best practice will increase the rate of development and raise morale further.

The governing body responded swiftly and incisively to the last inspection and took a strategic role in moving the school forward by setting up the strategic monitoring committee which meets weekly and is attended by governors, the local authority representative and senior leaders in the school, to monitor the impact of the action plan. It has a clear structure and brief to monitor and challenge the progress against the school's action plan. The governors have established additional meetings to monitor and challenge pupil progress against their targets; monitor the quality of teaching and learning and they have set up a forum for staff and governors to discuss the future developments of the school and challenge the rate of progress. They give an appropriate balance of challenge and support to the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is making good use of the local authority school improvement officer to help monitor the progress of the action plan. He attends the weekly strategic monitoring committee meetings and visits each term to offer support with data analysis; the quality of teaching and learning; and analyse external assessment. The local authority has also offered support to the headteacher and acting headteacher in terms of school to school support. The prompt action and progress being made by

the school has given the local authority confidence in the school's capacity to improve.

The acting headteacher has a mentor to support and challenge the changes she is implementing in the school and the local authority have offered you a mentor for when you return to school full-time in January. The diocese is supporting the school's action plan and the staff's well-being. There is a team of committed people offering support to move the school forward which reflects the determination of your school community.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools