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9 December 2013

Kathleen Williams
Executive Headteacher
Holy Cross RC School
Basuto Road
London
SW6 4BL

Dear Ms Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holy Cross RC School

Following my visit to your school on 9 December 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 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:

- ensure that pupils' have frequent opportunities to practise their writing skills with longer pieces of work
- sharpen the impact of teachers' marking by ensuring that pupils are given time in each lesson to respond to the teacher's comments
- reduce the number of worksheets and structured writing frames that pupils use in English and mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the assistant headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of pupils, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with a

group of leaders from your partner schools to discuss their support. The school action plan was evaluated. Minutes of governing body meetings, achievement information and your records of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning were scrutinised. I joined the assistant headteacher to visit all classrooms where we looked at a sample of pupils' English and mathematics books.

Context

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has been absent from the school. An interim special educational needs coordinator has been appointed to manage this area of work. A local authority governor has been appointed, but there remains a vacancy for a foundation governor.

Main findings

School leaders and the governing body have responded swiftly to the issues identified in the recent inspection. You are the driving force behind the improvements that are being made and, with the assistant headteacher, have set high expectations for the quality of teaching. The school's action plan clearly identifies what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done by. You have identified who is responsible for ensuring that each action is completed. You have ensured that teachers take greater responsibility for achieving challenging targets, with the introduction of class action plans. You are drawing effectively on your network of contacts with other successful schools to address the school's priorities. Leaders at neighbouring schools are working alongside your middle leaders to coach and mentor them in the skills that they need to lead other staff.

You have invested time into ensuring that teachers are trained in the skills that they require to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes. You expect teachers to closely track pupils' achievements and are ensuring that they have higher expectations for the progress that their pupils make. You have ensured teachers and the governors understand the link between the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and this in turn is related to salary progression.

You have been rigorous in monitoring the quality of teaching. This is leading to improvements which can be seen in pupils' books and in their learning and progress. Although pupils' books show that they are making better progress over time, there are still some inconsistencies between classes. Work is not always set which challenges all pupils to do as well as they can. Marking is improving, but pupils are not always given time to respond to the comments that teachers make about how they could improve, and this slows their progress. Some books are dominated by worksheets and loose sheets of paper and in others there is too little evidence of the work that pupils have completed.

The governing body responded decisively following the recent inspection. They have joined with your partner schools to look at how other governing bodies work with their leaders. Learning from the best practice, they have then adapted their own to improve their effectiveness. They have developed their skills at holding you and your leaders to account. This is evident from the quality of questions that they ask of leaders, recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

Governors have ensured that parents have been kept informed about the inspection and subsequent progress. They agree that they would now benefit from extra training in understanding data so that they become more adept at challenging leaders rather than accepting information at face value. Governors are full of praise for your high expectations for pupils and staff alike and the pace that you have brought to moving the school forward. As one governor said, 'this school is going for outstanding and has all of the ingredients to be an outstanding 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 local authority worked with you to quickly identify the support that would be of most use to the school. You and the governors believe that this has been effective because it has been proportionate to your needs. You appreciate the high quality human resources support that you have been given to manage staff absence. The appointment of a project manager for the current building programme has ensured that you have not been distracted from your urgent school improvement work. A behaviour consultant has successfully addressed one of the issues raised in the inspection report by working alongside individual teachers to improve the way that they manage pupils' behaviour.

However, the local authority's plans to monitor improvements at the school already show some signs of slippage. The 'improvement board' has yet to meet. Plans to have the board chaired by a school governor will not ensure its impartiality in holding all leaders to account for urgent improvement. Similarly, the review of teaching and learning, scheduled for the spring term 2014, has not been prioritised soon enough as a tool for evaluating the impact of leaders' actions.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of the Archdiocese of Westminster and the Director of Children's Services for Hammersmith and Fulham.

Yours sincerely

Adam Higgins
Her Majesty's Inspector