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Miss Julie Bainbridge
Headteacher
St Boniface RC Primary School
Yew Street
Salford
Greater Manchester
M7 2HL

Dear Miss Bainbridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Boniface RC Primary School, Salford

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 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:

- monitor carefully the impact of the new approach to teaching mathematics on the rate of progress made by pupils in mathematics lessons. Ensure all pupils benefit from consistently good teaching of mathematics by quickly modifying those elements of the programmes' delivery which slow down the rate of progress being made by a small number of pupils.
- further improve teachers' marking of pupils' work by building on the good practice already seen in some areas of the school. Ensure marking is used effectively by all teachers to provide additional challenge to all pupils and by giving pupils time to respond to the comments made by teachers.
- use the links made with a Local Leader of Education to ensure that leaders monitor the quality of teaching rigorously and take swift action to eradicate the pockets of weaker teaching.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with the headteacher, two governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also considered a range of information provided by the school including samples of pupils' work. I visited seven classrooms to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I also met with a group of 5 students to gather their views on the school's progress.

Context

Since my last monitoring visit, which took place in July 2013, the staff team has changed significantly. Two teachers began employment in September 2013 on permanent contracts. Three teachers, two of whom are newly qualified, have also been employed, on a temporary basis, to cover maternity leave and another teacher has recently been employed on a day to day basis in order to cover the long term absence of another teacher. The number of teachers employed by the school has not changed since my last visit.

Main findings

There has been a sea change in the leadership and management of the school since my last monitoring visit. Governors have taken part in a review of the way they work and as a result have already: increased their presence around school; started to form their own view about how well pupils are progressing in their learning; challenged leaders when leaders' actions are not effective. Leaders have developed a robust system to monitor pupils' progress and have started to use their evaluation to target precisely those pupils who need additional help with their reading, writing and mathematics. The appointment of a number of new teachers, although temporary in some cases, has bolstered the quality of teaching overall. Leaders are accurate in their judgement that teaching overall has improved, although they are also aware more still needs to be done to eradicate weak teaching in some areas of the school. Pupils have responded to the increased sense of purpose across the school with an enthusiasm which is beginning to be reflected in improved rates of progress in their learning.

The introduction of a whole school approach to the teaching of reading and writing and, very recently, mathematics, along with individualised training and support for teachers and their assistants, is beginning to reap rewards. Pupils overall are making big gains in their reading ability, particularly so in their understanding of what they read. When pupils are identified, for example, as having not quite grasped the meaning of a word or phrase or how to use a new element of punctuation, they are given effective additional, individualised support quickly and therefore do not fall behind their peers.

In mathematics the new method of teaching, which uses a practical approach to learning, has got children enthused about mathematics. Although it is too early to judge the full impact of this change, pupils spoken to said that they now looked forward to mathematics lessons and that the 'hands-on' approach has 'helped us understand fractions better'. In my visits to classrooms during mathematics lessons, pupils were indeed building on their understanding of fractions by taking part in a practical activity and learning how to add

fractions together. However, not all pupils were fully engaged for all of the time because they either had to wait too long before they could practice for themselves, or they could not see what other pupils were demonstrating at front of the classroom. As a result, a small number of pupils did not make the progress they were capable of.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work has also contributed to improvements in the rate of progress made by pupils. Teachers' marking now gives comments about why pupils' work is either good or not good enough. As a result pupils know what to do more of or what to do in order to improve next time. In some examples of pupils' work, the teachers marking was even better because it set additional questions such as 'Can you explain why?' and 'What do you think he was feeling?' to challenge pupils to think more deeply about their answers. While the pupils spoken to agreed that teachers' comments in their books were helpful, pupils do not always get the time to respond to comments and therefore teachers' marking is not yet effective enough in pushing pupils to make even better progress.

Governors too, have embraced the need to change and the effectiveness of their leadership is improving rapidly. Governors have used the support offered by a National Leader of Governance to draw up a comprehensive action plan designed to improve the effectiveness of the way governors work in school. Governors have already started to act on the plan: making themselves available to pupils and their parents in order to gather their views of the school; becoming involved in checking the effectiveness of classrooms displays; and forming a pupil disciplinary panel which has had an almost immediate effect on improving behaviour in 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

Leaders have continued to welcome the support provided by local authority officers and the links made with outstanding schools through both a National Leader of Governance and a Local Leader of Education. This external support has been used effectively by leaders as a means of improving teaching and also as a means of ensuring leaders' judgement about the progress pupils are making in their learning is accurate.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector