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Maria Kemble
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kemble

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, class teachers, one member of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. In addition, I spoke briefly with the Chair of the Governing Body on the telephone. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation and assessment documentation. I visited lessons in all classes, observing teaching and looking at pupils' work.

Context

One member of the teaching staff left the school at the end of the summer term and was replaced. The school is currently teaching English and mathematics in single-age groups. There has been a long period of unsettled staffing in recent years.

Main findings

The actions that you have taken since the inspection are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. All year groups are making better progress than was the case recently. Your school assessment data are showing that pupils are working at or around the national age-related expectations in English and mathematics across the school. You have made good use of the newly introduced assessment system to analyse the effectiveness of teaching, and this means that you are targeting your support to where it is most needed.

You responded to the inspection with an action plan that prioritises the right things. It is clear and straightforward and provides measurable milestones for you and your staff to evaluate the impact of your work as you are doing it. Governors understand and support the plan and are actively monitoring its progress. They are observing school leaders as they monitor important parts of the school's work. These monitoring events are much more regular now and are leading to improvements in classrooms across the school. You and your leaders are aware of what needs to be done and the time-frames involved.

You have been busy since the inspection. You introduced a wide range of initiatives to raise achievement, including the new assessment system, regular spelling and times-tables tests, learning logs for the older pupils and a new mathematics scheme. Many of these initiatives have had insufficient time to impact significantly on pupils' achievement. A clear improvement is that the school day runs more efficiently now and leaders are checking that very little learning time is wasted.

More work is needed to raise the quality of teaching across the school. You have identified that some teachers do not take sufficient account of how well pupils understand their tasks during lessons. It was clear in some lessons that I visited that this is the case: teachers' awareness of learning is not precise enough to be able to respond quickly to pupils who may find the work either too easy or too difficult. In addition, there is too much range in the pace and urgency in classrooms: some lessons are fast-paced and exciting, whereas others are not providing pupils with tasks or activities that spark their interest. Similarly, there is too much inconsistency in the quality of the presentation of pupils' work. Some teachers have higher expectations of pupils than others and this is reflected in the exercise books. Many pupils, and especially those in the younger classes, need to improve the quality of their letter formation when they are writing.

A local authority review identified that the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were not having sufficient access to the school's outdoor facilities, and in particular the natural resources that the school field provides. Too little has been done in response to this, and children continue to spend little time learning in natural surroundings. This is an important part of their curriculum and is currently underdeveloped.

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

External support

The local authority is providing appropriate support for the school. It has supported the development of the action plan and has reviewed provision in the early years. The local authority representative assigned to the school has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is working alongside you to improve things.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie

Her Majesty's Inspector