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14 December 2016

Ms Kathleen Williams
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Dear Ms Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 November 2016, 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 January 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, subject leaders, pupils, parents, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. In addition, all classrooms were visited jointly with the executive headteacher and head of school, and a range of documents was scrutinised, including for example, the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

Context

Since the last inspection, a number of teachers have left the school and have been replaced by new appointees. At the time of this visit, two assistant headteachers were on maternity leave with their roles being taken temporarily by middle leaders.

Main findings

Since your appointment as executive headteacher, just before the last inspection in September 2015, you have taken decisive action to raise standards and improve pupils' outcomes. This has had a profound impact on the school and its pupils, particularly the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. While there is still a little way to go, teaching across the school now has a much more positive effect on pupils' learning.

Achieving this improvement has not been without its challenges. In September 2015, some 70% of teachers were agency staff and consistency in the quality of teaching suffered as a result. However, you and your senior team have tackled the ineffective teaching successfully by setting high expectations, establishing a strong culture of achievement and not diverging from well-defined plans for improvement. This work has meant that a number of teachers left last academic year. Although this has presented challenges in relation to recruitment, you have been able to appoint new staff with the right skills and expertise needed to improve the overall quality of teaching. This represents a significant success and is testament to the tenacity and rigour of your leadership.

To improve teaching, learning and assessment, you have established a well-defined system for tracking teachers' performance. It is linked closely to the teachers' standards and includes a range of opportunities for support such as team teaching, observing others and mentoring. The tracking system uses a wide range of evidence, including assessment information, performance objectives and teaching and learning reviews. The evidence is detailed and robust and feeds into teacher appraisal and salary progression effectively. As a result, there is a positive dialogue between teachers and leaders about improvement.

The teachers and teaching assistants I spoke with were positive about the changes and improvements over the past year or so. They were very clear that the monitoring of teaching is much more rigorous than in the past and understand how this feeds into their appraisal. A particular feature of this process is that staff have a range of measurable targets that are based on the impact on pupils' progress. As staff noted, small, measurable targets have moved teaching forward successfully.

Middle leaders have taken a central role in the work to improve teaching. For example, they have had the task of improving the inadequate teaching so that it is moved to good. This has been achieved effectively by modelling best practice, coaching and 'peer' teaching, enabling teachers to improve their skills and raise

achievement in their classes. Middle leaders are now holding teachers to account for their work in a supportive and aspirational framework.

A range of professional development opportunities provides an additional layer of support for middle leaders, teachers and teaching assistants. The management team has attended training on how to resolve conflict. Partnerships with schools in the federation have allowed teachers to see how others work and to gain ideas about how to improve their own practice. This has done much to raise standards of teaching and ensure that there is good capacity for further improvement.

You have rightly identified achievement in reading and mathematics as a particular priority. Fewer pupils than average reached the expected standards for their age in the 2016 tests and progress was less than in other schools. The performance of disadvantaged pupils has also been identified as a weakness because their achievements lag behind those of others in the country and in the school. These weaknesses are the result of a legacy of underachievement and have left gaps in pupils' learning. While the impact on the 2016 tests was limited, pupils' achievements this term are now showing clear signs of improvement and the additional support is helping them to catch up.

Together with senior leaders, you have established a range of strategies to raise standards. The system for tracking pupils' progress is robust and based on well-founded assessment information. As a result, pupils who are falling behind with their learning, or experiencing difficulties, are identified quickly and provided with appropriate support that enables them to learn successfully.

You have also identified that for some pupils, barriers to learning are emotional and social, not just academic. To overcome these barriers, the school wisely works with a range of outside agencies, including the educational psychologist, social workers and consultants, to tackle issues such as confidence, self-esteem and, in some cases, mental health issues. This attention to pupils' social and emotional welfare, as well as to their academic progress, is a key plank in your improvement plan and has a positive impact on achievement.

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of provision in the early years. The quality of the outdoor area for Reception children has been upgraded and the classroom environment has been considerably improved. However, you recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that the outside area in the Nursery class is similarly improved. As a result of this work, children are beginning to make better progress.

The visits we made jointly to all of the classrooms indicate clearly that your focus on improving teaching quality and pupils' outcomes is paying off. Two notable features were the excellent behaviour of pupils and the skilled way that most teachers manage learning. They use their subject knowledge well to motivate and interest pupils. Teachers provide challenging work, including for the most able,

disadvantaged pupils and those who are struggling. It was also noticeable that there was consistency in the way teachers plan their lessons and use a range of approaches to support learning, including the teaching of phonics. While there is still some work to do, the school is well on the way to ensuring that teaching is consistently strong across all subjects.

The external review of the use of pupil premium funding has been used effectively to evaluate the impact of spending on pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders are rigorous about making changes to the way the pupil premium funding is used to gain maximum benefit for pupils. As a result, the funding is used well to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Attendance and punctuality have improved this term because of better communication with parents. For example, you are involving parents in discussions about how to support their children's learning and have provided a resource pack for them to use at home. There have also been parent workshops to explain the approaches the school is using to help pupils learn. An interesting aspect of this work is that it also helps to overcome some of the barriers to learning such as lateness or emotional difficulties.

Governors have commissioned an external review of governance which is due to take place very shortly. However, governors have acted on the recommendations of the last inspection to develop their skills. For example, they have changed the structure of the governing body and governors have a broader range of relevant skills. Governors carry out their safeguarding duties effectively and have had training on the 'Prevent' duty, safer recruitment and child sexual exploitation.

External support

The school uses a wide range of external support very effectively. It has built productive partnerships with other schools in the federation and locally. This includes working with other schools to moderate the assessments of pupils' progress. Local authority reviews of teaching and learning have been used well to identify where further improvement is needed. These partnerships and collaborations are helping to secure improvements to pupils' progress and attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector