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Ms Penny Sherborne
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Hampshire
PO12 3NB

Dear Ms Sherborne

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

Following my visit to your school on 11 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that its action plan has clear measures for success and specific timescales
- embed plans for effective leadership of English and mathematics
- establish effective systems for sharing good practice so that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment improves
- improve the quality of teaching in reading and mathematics so that a higher proportion of pupils make good progress and attain well at the end of key stage 2.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, two members of the governing body and the local authority adviser to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I spoke formally with a group of pupils and informally with others when observing the school's work.

I conducted joint lesson observations with you and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. The school's action plan was evaluated.

I gave formal feedback on the inspection findings to you, the assistant headteacher, two members of the governing body, the adviser from the local authority and the director of schools for the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth.

Context

This was the first monitoring visit since the school's section 5 inspection in July 2017. The school's senior leadership structure has changed. The headteacher joined the school as a seconded deputy headteacher in April 2017 and was appointed as the headteacher in September 2017. The assistant headteacher was seconded from another school in September 2017. This arrangement will continue until the end of the summer term 2019. The chair of the governing body has been in post since the July 2017 inspection. There is currently one vacancy for a parent governor.

Main findings

This monitoring inspection report confirms that much work has been done to address the previous inspection findings. Senior leaders and governors are not complacent and recognise the need to continue to improve.

The school's action plan for improvement focuses appropriately on the weaknesses identified during the July 2017 inspection. Suitable actions are identified, but success measures, timescales and responsibilities are not clear enough to drive improvements robustly and rapidly. Leaders of English and mathematics have action plans for their areas of responsibility that successfully guide their work, but the absence of a clear strategic overview means that there is not a sufficient framework to pull together the work of the school. Leadership of English and mathematics has not yet transferred fully from the assistant headteacher to the leaders of English and mathematics. Consequently, the plans for improvement have not yet had a significant impact in all key stages.

As identified in the previous inspection report, senior leaders have continued to improve the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment in many areas of the curriculum. For example, the teaching and learning of phonics have improved markedly. Leaders have embedded a uniform approach to phonics teaching,

resulting in many pupils developing strong decoding skills. Whole-school training, together with joint planning and team teaching, has supported teachers and teaching assistants to develop a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Similarly, leaders have improved the teaching, learning and assessment of writing through whole-school training. In their teaching of writing, teachers focus consistently on ensuring that pupils use language appropriately and accurately to match the requirements of audience, purpose and text type. Consequently, pupils' achievements in writing have improved in both key stage 1 and key stage 2.

Although improvements in all areas are evident at key stage 1, pupils' progress and attainment at key stage 2 in 2018 in reading and mathematics were below the national average. Leaders have reviewed the accuracy of pupils' assessment information through whole-school training and more frequent monitoring and tracking of pupils' assessment information. Consequently, leaders and staff have identified gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in mathematics and reading for meaning. Teachers and teaching assistants receive ongoing training alongside external expert support to strengthen pupils' mathematical skills, knowledge and understanding. This is confirmed in the written work seen in pupils' books and in lessons that I observed. However, teachers do not consistently plan lessons to meet the needs of all pupils. This results in some pupils' gaps in understanding not being fully addressed. Leaders have selected three teachers to attend an external course on outstanding teaching, but it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative on improving the quality of teaching.

Leaders have reviewed the reading curriculum to raise pupils' progress and attainment. Through observations, analysis of pupils' assessment information and discussions with staff, you identified issues with the carousel of reading activities that teachers used in class. Consequently, leaders have trained teachers to teach whole-class reading with a focus on developing pupils' understanding of how language shapes meaning. You also reviewed the texts used in reading lessons and purchased high-quality texts. Leaders piloted this approach with a Year 1 and 2 class. This has resulted in significant improvements in pupils' attainment in 2018. It is too early, however, to judge the impact of this approach across all year groups.

Through thorough analysis of pupils' assessment information, leaders and staff track and monitor the progress of the most able pupils more frequently. The most able pupils are set challenging activities and provided with additional support to extend their skills, knowledge and understanding in many areas at key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who attained greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 in 2018 increased markedly, although it was still below the national average. However, in 2018 the most able pupils at key stage 2 did not make significant progress in reading or mathematics. Inspection evidence demonstrates that although some teachers set challenging activities for the most able pupils, this is not yet consistent across the school.

Pupils take pride in their work in most subjects and teachers address the

importance of presentation in books. Pupils behave well both within the classroom and around the school. They are kind, courteous and welcoming both to visitors and to their peers. The overwhelming majority of pupils told me that they liked the school and enjoyed learning.

The governing body is effective in gathering information to support and challenge the work of leaders and staff. As frequent visitors to the school, governors gain a clear understanding of its strengths and continuing areas for development. This enables governors to ask pertinent questions. Governors' work follows closely the key priorities identified in the school action plan.

External support

The Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service provides effective support to the school through frequent leadership meetings, subject-specific support and reviews of pupils' work at all key stages. Additionally, the Pioneer Teaching School Alliance provides training for teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector