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16 June 2015

Mrs Rachael Tyler
Headteacher
St Brigid's Catholic Primary School
Waterpark Drive
Stockbridge Village
Liverpool L28 7RE

Dear Mrs Tyler

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Brigid's Catholic Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 16 June 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 March 2015. 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 as described below.

Revise the action plan so that progress can be tracked more readily by:

- using measurable milestones in the body of the plan
- aligning steps to be taken with milestones
- clarifying which person is responsible for each action
- separating monitoring (checking) from evaluation (judging effects).

In half-termly meetings, review the progress of every pupil rather than of groups.

Improve the work of some classes and groups so that it matches the best by:

- giving pupils time to respond to marking and feedback
- ensuring all children have grasped a mathematics topic before moving on
- giving pupils opportunities to speak in different situations to improve their confidence and to use correct grammar in formal situations.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met you, other senior staff, a group of classroom teachers, members of the governing body, and representatives of the diocese and local authority to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's post-inspection action plan and supporting documents on performance management and self-evaluation. I heard a sample of pupils reading and did a learning walk into classrooms in Key Stages 1 and 2, carried out jointly with you. We talked with pupils about their work and the feedback they receive to improve it.

Context

There have been changes to staffing since inspection. Of a staff of nine teachers (full time equivalent), two have left and replacements have been appointed. The school is in the process of an amicable end to the federation with the nearby St Albert's Catholic Primary School, planned for completion by September 2015.

Main findings

In the action plan and supporting documents, dates suggest that senior leaders and governors have been prompt in starting key actions. Staff and leaders met the day after inspection. Relevant training in staff meeting time began within a week. A programme of staff development has been sustained since March. Formal action has been taken to support and challenge underperforming staff. Reviews of pupil premium and governance were also initiated shortly after inspection.

This prompt start reflects growing awareness of the headteacher and governors during the last year that standards were not good enough, a view supported by a local authority review of teaching and learning. As a result, a number of key actions were already in place at the time of inspection, including performance management and pupil progress meetings.

The frequency of progress meetings has been increased to every half term. Teachers prepare data themselves, to a pattern common across the school, so improving their understanding and use of data. Currently, the focus is on underachieving groups. Nevertheless, reviewing progress of all pupils should ensure that able children are given full attention; progress may look acceptable but in fact could be much better.

The action plan itself has a number of weaknesses. The body of the plan does not have enough measurable success criteria. There is over-reliance on broad end of Key Stage targets that are stated in the opening pages, which do not adequately reflect new forms of assessment without levels. 'Milestones' often repeat 'actions to be taken' rather than adding evidence of impact. Monitoring is confused with evaluation; these should be carried out separately. Too many people are listed as 'responsible', making it hard to hold individuals to account. Actions do not line up well with timescales or people responsible.

These problems are not a paper exercise. A clearer, more precise action plan will enable governors and leaders to maintain the start they have made in bringing about improvement. At present, it is not easy to see how governors can track progress, how leaders will know what works best, or what evidence they will use.

Pupils think that marking and feedback have got better since inspection. This is confirmed by evidence from books and in talking with teachers. Many pupils feel clearer about what to do next and some are given time to make improvements. All classes had made some progress in this respect but inconsistencies remain. Some new resources are in place, including books for more able readers.

In mathematics, greater attention has been given to children's understanding of the vocabulary of the subject, to problem-solving and to the questions teachers use. An example that worked well was when younger children were asked to say out loud maths questions involving words, whole numbers and fractions, and to explain what the question meant and how to tackle them.

In English, some children I talked with lacked confidence in speaking and listening. Some were not audible, did not make eye-contact, or take turns. Most children used informal grammar ('We was', 'I done'). Teachers should extend the range of opportunities (such as games, debates, role play, interviews, reading aloud) for children to speak for different purposes, and model correct grammar in formal situations.

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

Governors appreciate the support of the diocese in the detailed work required to de-federate St Brigid's from a neighbouring school, now that both have healthy school numbers, in order to focus on improvement at St Brigid's. The headteacher appreciates the pastoral support of diocesan officers. The diocese has discussed new guidance with the school to provide 'health checks' for earlier intervention.

The local authority review of learning and teaching in November 2014 gave added impetus to improvement before inspection. The human resources team has given support on the processes for working with underperformance of staff. The format for action planning suggested by the local authority needs updating: monitoring and evaluation should be more distinct; new forms of assessment should be recognised; more emphasis should be placed on measurable evidence.

The local authority should revise and update suggested formats for action planning with schools requiring improvement.

The diocese should continue to support St Brigid's to recruit foundation governors.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley and as below.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – Knowsley
- Diocese – Liverpool