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3 July 2017

Mr Tim Hallett
St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School, Crawley
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Dear Mr Hallett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School, Crawley

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 2017, 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 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016, 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.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the focus on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, the most able and the most able disadvantaged
- raise expectations throughout the school about how pupils present their work and ensure a consistent approach to handwriting
- secure agreement from the diocese and local authority to re-establish the governing body in a way that allows it to build on the successful work of the executive working group

- sharpen action plans so that there are measurable outcomes that new governors will be able to check when the governing body is re-established.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and assistant headteacher and a group of middle leaders. I also met the executive working group, two representatives of the diocese and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I had a tour of the school with the headteacher to observe learning in different year groups, talk to pupils about their work and look at pupils' workbooks. I had a discussion with a group of pupils from Year 2 and Year 5 and with a variety of pupils at breaktime. I had a discussion with a small group of parents before school. I attended an assembly led by a Year 4 class. I scrutinised the school improvement plan and a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, pupil achievement and governance.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school shortly after the last inspection. The assistant headteacher led the school on an interim basis between June and December 2016. The current headteacher took up his post in January 2017. Two teachers have left and three have joined the school since the inspection in March 2016.

The diocese and local authority temporarily suspended the full governing body and set up an executive working group in July 2016. This group comprises two governors, chosen for their skills and experience, and a third member from outside the school who is an advanced skills governor.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection leaders have successfully raised expectations and increased the level of challenge for pupils in their work. Since you joined the school in January you have added greater clarity and ambition. Parents have welcomed your visibility and the improved communication between school and home.

You are developing your team well and empowering them to raise standards further. Middle leaders are now making a substantial contribution to improving standards in their areas of responsibility.

Teaching and outcomes in the early years are improving. The stimulating learning environment is well resourced and encourages children to keep busy and develop their skills. For example, children play a game where they shoot water pistols at targets to practise their phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) skills by sounding out letters and words.

Work to develop a mastery approach to mathematics is becoming embedded and is leading to higher standards across key stage 1 and key stage 2. Pupils consistently complete 'practise me', 'use me' and 'show me' questions to demonstrate their fluency, problem-solving and reasoning skills respectively.

Progress is improving across the school for current pupils, including those in Year 6. However, you acknowledged that published outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 are still likely to show that pupils have made limited progress through the key stage. This is due to previous turbulence in leadership and teaching.

While pupils are certainly making more progress, there is more to be done to focus on specific groups of pupils to check if they are doing as well as other pupils. These groups include the disadvantaged, the most able and the most able disadvantaged. For example, your school tracking showed that disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were making slower progress than their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. However, further analysis indicated that half of these pupils also had special educational needs and/or disabilities. The other half were actually making much faster progress than their peers, helping them to catch up quickly.

Your pupils are a credit to your school and the community. They care deeply for each other, are immensely proud of their school and are dedicated to helping others. For example, the Year 4 pupils led an assembly to launch some charity work to raise awareness and funds for a water aid charity.

A scrutiny of workbooks showed that a minority of pupils do not take as much pride in the presentation of their work as other pupils. Pupils' handwriting throughout the school varies in its neatness and legibility.

Plans for improvement focus on the right things but you could give more prominence to the impact these actions will have on outcomes, especially for the most able and disadvantaged pupils. Intended outcomes need to be more measureable, especially for new governors to understand and in order to support their monitoring.

The recommendation for a review of governance made at the time of the previous inspection was superseded by the diocese and local authority deciding to suspend the full governing body and introduce an executive working group.

The executive working group's leadership and strategic direction have been transformational and have put in place rigorous systems and raised standards. Their frequent visits to the school and meetings with you and other leaders have driven the improvements being made. You trust the members of this group implicitly and value the challenge they provide. This work will need to be sustained when delegated powers are returned to the full governing body in the future. The executive working group has thought carefully about how it will manage that transition without losing momentum.

External support

The diocese and local authority have worked together very effectively to support the school. They took decisive action to suspend the full governing body and focus the school's attention on the most important things. They have regularly reviewed the work of the executive working group and school leaders in improving the school towards being good at the next inspection.

Additional support brokered through a local teaching school mathematics hub has helped leaders to successfully introduce a mastery approach to teaching mathematics. External consultants have worked with leaders to evaluate the positive impact of this work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive working group, the director of education for the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector