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Mrs Anna Gautrey
St Columba's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Gautrey

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

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken 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 school should take further action to:

- ensure that the coherent curriculum plans in place for all subjects show explicitly, how knowledge and skills build up over time in each subject, each year group and across different year groups.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher, various middle leaders and a range of staff. I also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I discussed the support and actions taken since the last inspection with the education adviser from the local authority. I also had a telephone conversation with the director of education and the school improvement officer from

the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds. I scrutinised school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plans. I conducted short visits to lessons with yourself and your acting headteacher. A sample of pupils' work from those lessons was reviewed alongside senior leaders. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 4 and 5 to discuss their work. I spoke to a number of pupils informally about what is like to be a pupil at the school.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing, including the leadership of the school. The previous executive headteacher and three teachers left the school. In September 2019, governors appointed the previous head of school as the substantive headteacher. Currently, the substantive deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher are operating as acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher respectively, to cover the headteacher's maternity leave. Governors appointed a new leader for early years, two newly qualified teachers, a higher-level teaching assistant (HLTA) and a home-school support worker in September 2019. In January 2020, another newly qualified teacher was appointed as a Year 5 teacher. The middle leadership of the school has been restructured. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in September 2019.

Main findings

Since the last inspection you have acted swiftly and reviewed all areas of the school, correctly identifying strengths and prioritising areas for improvement. Supported by the governing body, the local authority and the Diocese of Leeds, you are managing changes effectively to eradicate weak teaching. Together with your senior leadership team, you are passionate and relentless in your drive for continuous improvement. Governors appointed experienced staff to lead key areas of the school. You ensure that senior and middle leaders receive appropriate training. You reviewed the school's middle leadership structure and introduced phase leaders for early years, key stage 1, lower key stage 2 and upper key stage 2. As a result, leadership and management have been significantly strengthened. There is strong capacity for further improvement. Your improvement plans are detailed, focused and evaluated accurately against criteria for success. Leaders and governors are taking a range of appropriate actions to address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. As a result, most areas of the school's performance are improving rapidly.

You have raised expectations across the school. Supported by governors, you have taken decisive action to eradicate weak teaching and leadership. The lines of accountability have been strengthened as a result of the restructuring of your middle leadership. Senior and middle leaders have received appropriate training. For example, two middle leaders have completed and one middle leader is currently studying the national professional qualification for middle leadership (NPQML). The deputy headteacher has completed the national professional qualification for headship (NPQH). The support from the local authority has ensured that phase

leaders lead their phases with confidence. As a result, the progress that pupils make and standards pupils reach are improving rapidly, especially at key stage 1. Some weak teaching in previous years is still affecting the published outcomes for key stage 2.

At the last inspection, you were asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills to enable them to reach higher standards in mathematics. School leaders reviewed the mathematics curriculum and a new leader for this area was appointed. There is regular monitoring of the implementation of the curriculum to ensure that the most able pupils move on to more complex tasks when they are ready. Evidence from the joint scrutiny of books confirms this. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard is improving. Links between mathematics and other subjects have been strengthened. Pupils have more opportunities to practise their mathematical skills in a range of subjects, including science.

You have ensured that teachers receive appropriate professional development to implement the ambitious school curriculum. Teachers regularly share best practice, for example by carrying out joint work scrutinies. They welcome the opportunity to learn from each other through working together regularly. As a result, the quality of teaching across the school is improving.

The governance of the school is improving. Governors have a wide range of knowledge and expertise. They are committed to the continuous improvement of the school. Governors work closely with leaders in monitoring the performance of the school. They now receive information in a simpler format than previously. Governors reviewed their meeting structure. This has led to much-improved attendance at meetings and increased opportunities to challenge and support the work of school leaders.

You have appointed a new member of staff to lead the teaching of phonics in the school. There is a close working relationship between the phonics leader, the early years leader and the Year 2 teachers. Staff in early years and key stage 1 have received appropriate training in the teaching of phonics. As a result, the quality of teaching of phonics in the school has improved further. Regular assessment and effective intervention strategies for pupils who fall behind have resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of pupils who reach the standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

The new and experienced leader of the early years is accelerating the rate of improvement in this area. She has ensured that the strengths of the curriculum and quality of teaching found in the Reception class are mirrored in the Nursery class. The environment across all classes is now stimulating. Children are curious and engage in a variety of tasks with enthusiasm.

School leaders have reviewed the school's curriculum. Governors, staff and pupils have contributed to this review. You have ensured that the curriculum not only matches the national curriculum but goes beyond it to reflect the needs of the pupils at your school. Curriculum plans are coherent and carefully thought out for the different subjects. Although there is some sequencing in the content for each subject, it is not explicitly clear how knowledge and skills build up over time in each subject, as pupils progress through the school. You agreed with me that there is more work to do in this area.

Ensuring that pupils attend school regularly continues to be a high priority for the school. Leaders monitor and analyse attendance information frequently. They quickly identify pupils and families who need support and take appropriate action. Rewards for good attendance feature highly in the school. You have recently appointed a home-school support worker to strengthen the school's attendance team further and provide additional challenge and support. As a result, the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school has reduced significantly.

External support

The external support provided to the school has come from the local authority and the school improvement team from the Diocese of Leeds. The local authority has brokered leadership positions in the school. The education adviser knows the school well and has regular reviews with you to support your school's continuous improvement. Both the local authority and the Diocese of Leeds provide challenge and professional development opportunities for leaders in the school and governors. Consequently, action plans are focused and accurately evaluated. You have access to specialist leaders of education. As a result, staff, at all levels, are becoming more confident in developing their skills further.

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

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis
Her Majesty's Inspector