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16 July 2013

Mrs Brenda Schouller
Headteacher
St Paul's Catholic Primary School
Bourne Road
Paulsgrove
Portsmouth
PO6 4JD

Dear Mrs Schouller

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

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this visit I met with you and the acting deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, the school improvement officer from the local authority and a group of middle leaders. We went on a tour of the school and I reviewed the school action plan.

Main findings

Before the previous inspection the headteacher and the local authority had accurately identified the key areas for improvement in the school. A deputy headteacher had already been seconded from another school to strengthen leadership. He has now taken up the substantive post in the school.

Since the previous inspection a number of staff have resigned from their posts and will be leaving at the end of the summer term. Vacancies have been filled and a total of seven new teachers, including two with leadership responsibilities, will be joining the school in September. This represents over half the teaching staff. Restructuring teachers' roles and responsibilities and allocations of classes have understandably been key priorities in order to be ready for the new academic year.

The action plan to improve the school is clear with measurable outcomes and defined timescales. It has been fully shared with staff and governors and it is obvious how improvements will be evaluated.

There are signs that actions taken to improve the school are having a positive impact. Senior leaders frequently visit lessons to monitor the quality of teaching and marking. The headteacher is able to point to specific improvements in teaching: pupils have better opportunities to discuss ideas productively, their presentation is neater and there is less wasted time on the carpet before moving on to the next steps in the lesson. The headteacher and senior leaders are working purposefully to develop an improved approach to planning lessons that challenge all pupils.

A helpful partnership with another primary school has been set up, providing staff with opportunities to learn from good and outstanding teaching. The headteacher has sensibly increased the frequency of assessment points in the school year, moving to a six week cycle, including a meeting with each class teacher to review pupils' progress and identify any pupils who need to catch up.

A better focus has been placed on developing leadership throughout the school, although it is too soon to evaluate the full impact. Middle leaders are currently reviewing their own practice and teaching in their areas. For example, the subject leader for mathematics has reviewed the quality of marking and is in the process of developing a better approach to marking and feedback. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is reviewing individual education plans of pupils supported at school action with a view to improving intervention programmes. The leader for early years is making better use of data to evaluate pupils' acquisition of early learning goals. Senior leaders have also made sure that teachers' assessments are more accurate and precise and that they are able to set pupils realistic and challenging targets based on sublevels of progress. As a result, teachers are raising their expectations of pupils in the school.

The 2013 Key Stage Two results confirmed the previous inspection findings that pupils do not make enough progress and that the school needs to focus on improving pupils' writing. School leaders are rightly aware that better opportunities for exciting, purposeful writing are needed. The school is adopting the international primary curriculum with the intention of promoting more varied and inspiring

experiences for the pupils. The school is also adopting the principles of talk for writing, to improve pupils' self-expression, fluency and vocabulary.

Since the previous inspection, governors are providing greater challenge. They are visiting the school more frequently and have gained a better understanding of what good teaching should look like. They have attended training in understanding pupil progress data and are beginning to understand how results can be compared with those of pupils in other schools. The Chair of Governors is attending training with the national college of school leadership.

The local authority was aware of the decline in the school's performance before the previous inspection and has been providing effective support. A school improvement officer is working closely with school leaders and has arranged a useful partnership with another school. Further support from specialist advisers is planned for next term.

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority are beginning to take effective action to tackle the areas identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure that the new team of senior and middle leaders establish consistently good approaches to planning sequences of lessons
- develop teachers' skills in teaching English, including planning exciting and meaningful opportunities for writing.

HMI will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

Further visits in the autumn term will include a focus on developing school leaders' skills in monitoring and evaluation, observations of teaching and a review of pupils' writing.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Portsmouth and the Director of the Catholic Diocese for Portsmouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector