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Mr Gerry Kelly
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Smith Street
Ryhope
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR2 0RQ

Dear Mr Kelly

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 November 2013. 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 to:

- use a range of monitoring evidence, including more frequent lesson observations, to make judgements about the quality of teaching and whether this is leading to good learning and progress overtime in each class
- further refine and sharpen the focus of the school improvement plan to clarify who is responsible for actions so the plan can be used by leaders, including governors, to accurately measure the impact of their work in tackling the school's weaknesses
- further develop the skills of middle leaders so that they can play a robust and consistent part in monitoring teaching and learning
- provide updated information to parents about the progress that is being made towards becoming a good school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other leaders. We visited classrooms and spoke with pupils about their work. I met with members of the governing body, including the Chair of Governors, and with a representative from the local authority. I looked at documents including the school's improvement plans, achievement data and records of your monitoring activities.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have moved promptly to address the issues identified by the recent section 5 inspection. A detailed post inspection plan has been drawn up which specifically identifies how the school will respond to the three improvement areas raised in the report. The plan focuses on what needs to be done to improve the school and it has milestones to flag progress along the way. However, the plan needs to show clearly which members of the school are leading on the actions, which are monitoring that the planned actions are being undertaken and who is evaluating the impact of these actions on pupils' learning.

Working with local authority staff, leaders at the school have improved the impact of the school's regular assessments of pupils' progress. Pupil progress meetings now take place in each half term and are supported by a fortnightly scrutiny of teachers' planning and a review of pupils' work books. Leaders' skills in undertaking classroom observations and those needed to check pupils' progress have also been enhanced through the support they have received from staff at St John Bosco, a local outstanding school. This school has enabled staff from St Patrick's school to see examples of outstanding lesson planning and teaching. This is leading directly to the improvements being made in the quality of teaching. This fruitful partnership has also meant that leaders are better able to make robust judgements, informed by higher expectations and more secure knowledge, about the effectiveness of teaching and the accuracy of assessments of pupils' work.

Since the recent section 5 inspection the headteacher has worked promptly with staff to introduce a range of interventions to address weaknesses in the achievement of pupils and groups of pupils in the school. The school's recent monitoring and assessment evidence shows early signs of better progress being made by pupils. The school has also moved effectively to tackle the persistently poor attendance of a small group of pupils. Working with the local authority, the school is now robustly challenging the parents of these pupils and already attendance is improving for this group. The governing body is ambitious for the school and has a clear view of what needs to be done. It has a school improvement group that meets regularly to assess the impact of the school's actions. However, while the Headteacher is providing the governors with accurate information about the progress being made, a wider range of evidence is needed if governors are to have a full and complete understanding to determine whether enough is being done to tackle all areas requiring improvement. The existing links between individual and groups of governors and areas and subjects in the school should be strengthened so that governors are more focused and can see more clearly their contribution in making improvements.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is now providing senior leaders and governors with effective support, particularly in relation to literacy and the monitoring of pupils' progress. The close links with St John Bosco Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School are providing effective opportunities for staff from St Patrick's School to work with St John Bosco staff and to experience outstanding practice. St John Bosco School has also supported the leadership of St Patrick's in the construction and monitoring of its plans.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Sunderland and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector