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13 May 2015

Rachel Mahon
Headteacher
St Mary and St Michael Primary School
Sutton Street
Commercial Road
Shadwell
E1 0BD

Dear Ms Mahon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary and St Michael Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 13 May 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 February 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 to:

- Give a high priority to recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff who can support the drive for improvement at the start of the autumn term.
- Roll out and establish the planned programme for developing writing, and ensure that all initiatives to enhance pupils' literacy and mathematical skills, and the leadership skills of middle leaders are sustained.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, two groups of pupils, including a representative group of boys across the year groups; the Senior School Improvement representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor. The school

raising achievement plan was evaluated. A number of documentations were taken into consideration; these included recent minutes of governors' meetings, monitoring information on pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and teachers' performance. The quality of pupils' writing was also scrutinised. One of the deputy headteachers took me on a tour of the school and we made very short visits to lessons in most year groups, including early years.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection, there has been no change in staffing and the number of pupils on roll has remained stable. The situation is however, changing as five teachers will be leaving at the end of the current term; all for personal reasons. An experienced teacher has been appointed to teach one class in Year 5. Senior leaders have not made any further appointments because of extreme difficulties recruiting experienced applicants.

The governing body has also been restructured. The school currently works in partnership with two good local schools, Marion Richardson and Mowlem. Links with Bishop Challoner Catholic Federation of Schools, the adjoining outstanding secondary school is being developed.

Main findings

As the new headteacher during the last section 5 inspection, you and other senior leaders were not surprised about the inspection judgement. Changes to improve the school's effectiveness were not embedded and neither was there a consistent approach to developing good teaching practice. As a result, you have all responded quickly and effectively to addressing the areas for improvement. Despite difficulties with recruiting suitably qualified class teachers, you have not delayed introducing planned improvements. Forward planning reflects careful consideration of potential difficulties with staffing. As a result, you and the governors have increased the capacity of senior leaders to play a leading role in sustaining the changes, as lead practitioners while taking on classroom teaching, as necessary.

Much work has been done to develop pupils' writing skills. Senior leaders are maintaining a sharp focus on developing literacy skills, in particular, the quality of writing across all subjects. Improvements include for example, targeted resources for boys and blogging and regular, focused extended writing activity in each year group. Additionally, in-depth colour coded marking show tangible evidence that pupils are writing more at length, and they are using a range of writing techniques for different purposes. A well-planned writing initiative has started in the current term in Year 2 and is being rolled out with planned training for staff. It is, however, too early to comment on this recent programme. Pupils are very keen to learn and they articulate this enthusiasm very well. However, you are now aware that at times, boys tend to lose interest in writing. They say that there are too many incidental activities and restrictions before they can begin writing about their ideas.

Middle leaders are also involved in driving the changes. They report that the change in culture is positive because they are leading improvement and staff are communicating directly with them. They are responding well to the training and advice from the local authority consultants. However, there is still more work to do in developing their leadership and management skills. Governors are very clear about the priorities for the school and are very much involved in working with you and staff to improve outcomes. For example, they have been instrumental in prompting pupils to show their understanding of persuasive writing techniques by provoking them to present their views on whether or not school should open on Saturdays. Governors know the school well, and provide challenge while monitoring the progress of pupils. Your raising achievement plan is well-thought out and was amended with the support from the local authority after you and another senior leader attended the Ofsted seminar of Getting to good.

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

The local authority is very supportive. You and your staff are making good use of the targeted support and guidance from the literacy and mathematics consultants the training provided for middle leaders. The School Improvement Officer has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the school through timed visits, and the Targeted Intervention Group meetings. Senior officers use this forum to hold you and other leaders to account very well. This is helping you and your senior team to reflect on practice and become more rigorous when planning for improvement. The local authority has indicated that support will be provided with the interview process, if needed. Improvements have also been well supported by the partnership work with the Mowlem and Marion Richardson primary school, in particular, the joint reviews, assessment work and sharing of good practice in mathematics and English have all been very helpful to developing the capacity of your staff work with Bishop Challoner Catholic Federation of Schools to develop a mentoring reading programme is at the early stage of development.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Tower Hamlets.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector