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19 April 2013

Mrs Juliet Walling
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster
Aldrens Lane
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA1 2DU

Dear Mrs Walling

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster, Lancashire.

Following my visit to your school on 18 April 2013, 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders and managers, six members of the governing body and a local authority officer. I evaluated the school improvement plan and reviewed minutes from governing body meetings and the school's monitoring records. I also visited each classroom to meet pupils and staff.

Context

At the time of my visit over half of the classes were being taught by temporary teachers. The acting deputy headteacher is due to take extended leave and the senior leader seconded by the local authority from a nearby school will leave the school at the end of the summer term. The school is in the process of appointing a substantive deputy headteacher to take up post in September 2013.

Main findings

All of the representatives I met during my visit agree that the findings from the recent inspection are fair and provide a good platform on which to build the school's future success. Immediate action has been taken to tackle some of the key weaknesses. The marking and handwriting policies have been reviewed. This means teachers' feedback is becoming more detailed, particularly in writing, so pupils are receiving clearer guidance on what they need to do to improve. In addition pupils are beginning to show greater pride in their work. Whole-school training has led to improved classroom displays which are supporting pupils' learning through helpful prompts. It is clear that you, the governing body and the staff are taking the right action and this is beginning to bear fruit. Nonetheless, the pace of change is not rapid enough. This is because teaching arrangements in most classrooms remain temporary. As permanent staff return to work, there will be considerable gaps to fill to ensure all teachers are up to speed with new ways of working and updated teaching techniques. Teachers are eagerly taking part in training opportunities to develop their teaching skills in the short term. However this is not addressing how teaching will impact on helping pupils to make sustained and more rapid progress over the longer term.

The governing body is beginning to provide stronger leadership and direction, but you, as the headteacher, are continuing to shoulder too much of the responsibility to ensure the school is judged good at the next inspection. Leadership responsibility is not dispersed well enough across the school because of the temporary nature of some key posts. It is apparent that you are taking appropriate steps to shore up leadership roles through the appointment of a permanent deputy headteacher. Nevertheless, staff absence is currently standing in the way of tackling major shortcomings in a timely way.

The school development plan sets out clearly what the school needs to do to become good. However, some of the targets for success, particularly around pupils' achievement are not challenging enough if the school is to help pupils make good progress and begin to reach the standards expected for their age. Improving teaching has a high priority with planned opportunities for whole-school training and individual support to help all teachers develop their practice. Checks on teaching are frequent and thorough. Teachers know what they need to do to improve and training opportunities are matched closely to identified weaknesses.

The governing body is keen to raise its game so that it is better placed to play a key role in driving the school forward. Governors are committed to reducing barriers which may prevent the school from becoming good. Recent training has cemented their understanding of governor responsibilities. Governors' increased levels of confidence mean that they are asking more challenging questions about teaching and pupils' achievement. Governors have set up a new committee which is charged with keeping a close eye on the school's progress. They are working with the local authority to audit their individual skills and expertise to help them identify what they need to do to become more effective. Nonetheless, the planned actions to improve

governance are not sharp enough because the long term goals for success lack clarity and precision.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- increase the pace of improvement in the school by ensuring that leadership responsibilities are more evenly shared amongst key staff who have the skills and confidence to make a difference to teaching and learning
- review the targets in the action plan to ensure they are sufficiently challenging and will help pupils to make good progress and reach the standards expected for their age
- revisit the planned actions to improve governance so there are clear goals for improvement which influence the training programme.

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

External support

The support provided by the local authority is well rounded and effectively meeting the needs of the school. This is because the local authority's role is identified clearly in the school's improvement plan and there is a shared understanding between local authority officers and school staff of what needs to happen to make the school more effective. The responsibility for improving the school lies firmly with school staff. Nonetheless, local authority officers are helping the school on this journey through whole-school training, advice and guidance on staff issues and support for the governing body through attendance at key meetings. Plans are in place to strengthen senior leadership if the school is unsuccessful in appointing key leaders. The Diocese has been proactive in securing four foundation governors to strengthen the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire and the Director of the Lancaster Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector