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Mrs Liz Thomas
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Goldenhill
Mobberley Road
Goldenhill
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST6 5RN

Dear Mrs Thomas

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Goldenhill, Stoke-On-Trent

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 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 December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a representative of the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. He visited all classes, looked at a sample of pupils' books, and evaluated the school improvement plan and records of the outcomes of monitoring activities.

Context

A new headteacher started on 1 January 2013. A new deputy headteacher took up post on 15 April on a part-time basis. This will become a full-time appointment in May 2013. The school has plans to become an academy later this year.

Main findings

The new headteacher has acted with urgency to raise pupils' achievement through improving the quality of teaching. Working closely with the local authority, she has ensured that a detailed improvement plan is in place which is closely linked with the areas identified for improvement at the last Ofsted inspection. The addition to the plan of regular and measurable achievement targets would enable the school's leaders and the governing body to check that pupils are on course to make the rapid progress necessary. The headteacher regularly visits lessons and looks at pupils' work in books to evaluate pupils' achievement, check on the quality of teaching and give to teachers advice how to improve. With the headteacher's guidance and support, other leaders are beginning to develop these important leadership skills. The teacher with responsibility for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is developing her skills well and is now more rigorously keeping a check on the progress of all vulnerable groups of pupils.

Staff have received training and many policies and practices have been reviewed. The revised marking policy is ensuring that pupils are given clearer advice how to improve their work. Although it is too early for these new approaches to have had a marked impact on raising achievement, the school's assessments show that progress is starting to get faster.

Working with a lead teacher from a local partner school, the Reception and Nursery class teachers have significantly improved the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. These teachers now have a better understanding of how to use questioning skills to extend children's learning and are using assessment information more effectively to plan for the needs of individual children. The governing body has plans to appoint a leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage before the start of the next school year. Many of the resources in the Early Years Foundation Stage are of poor quality. The outdoor area does not allow children easy access to the outdoor facilities and is not used effectively to stimulate children's learning. Children's toilets are in urgent need of refurbishment. In the rest of the school some areas are well-maintained, attractive and stimulate pupils' learning, but there are too many areas which give the impression that there is a lack of pride in the school. For example, signs are broken and not mended or replaced, and some of the children's work and posters to parents are badly displayed and often faded because they have not been changed regularly. Governors say that they are now receiving much more information from the headteacher than before. However, their knowledge of the achievement of different groups of pupils, for example, the achievement of the pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, is not detailed enough.

Although there are still many improvements to be made, it is essential that all leaders continue to focus on improving the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better. Before the end of the summer term 2013, the local authority has agreed to undertake a review of the performance of the school, with a strong focus on the quality of teaching and the accuracy of the assessment data.

The next HMI monitoring visit will focus on:

- conducting joint lesson observations with the headteacher and other senior leaders
- evaluating further improvements.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that, while the focus is maintained on improving the quality of teaching, further action is taken to:

- ensure that the plans for improvement show regular and measurable achievement targets
- improve the quality of the resources in the Early Years Foundation Stage and ensure that the outdoor area is used effectively to stimulate children's learning
- ensure that all adults and pupils take a pride in the school and keep all areas well-maintained, attractive and stimulating
- ensure that the governing body has a good knowledge and understanding of the achievement of all groups of pupils, including those for whom the school receives pupil premium funding.

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

External support

The local authority has supported the newly appointed headteacher well with her drive for school improvement. The links with the local partner school have provided effective support for the teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent and to the Diocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector