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9 May 2013

Mr M Ewing  
Headteacher  
St Catherine's RC Primary School  
Greystoke Gardens  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
Tyne and Wear  
NE2 1PS

Dear Mr Ewing

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Catherine's RC Primary School, Newcastle Upon Tyne**

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

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other school leaders, with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and with the school's achievement partner and a representative from the local authority. The inspector also met with two classroom teachers and undertook two brief learning walks, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school improvement plan was evaluated prior to the visit.

**Context**

There have been no significant changes to staff or the school's organisation since the inspection.

## **Main findings**

A suitable improvement plan is in place to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection, divided into seven strands aligning with aspects of the school's work. A useful 'operational plan' has been developed to provide a timeline of actions and to prevent slippage in meeting the objectives of the overall improvement plan. An appropriate range of priorities are in place, linked to suitable success criteria. The plan would be further strengthened by stating more clearly the actions and targets for different groups of pupils, such as those in receipt of the pupil premium. In addition, although plans state clear targets for the proportion of pupils who will meet nationally expected rates of progress, they do not specify targets for the proportion of pupils who will exceed this benchmark. Lastly, although the plan identifies which governors are involved in monitoring different aspects of the improvement plan, further work is needed to make clear how governors will hold the school to account for progress against these aspects.

Senior leaders have placed an emphasis on strengthening management processes and this has raised levels of accountability for the progress that pupils make. For example, a more rigorous approach to the performance management of staff is now in place, and interim reviews of staff performance have recently taken place. Teachers report that the feedback they receive, and the points for improvement that are identified, are helping them to improve their practice. A structured process by which teachers work together in small groups to plan and teach lessons is gathering momentum and is helping to identify features of good and outstanding teaching. Plans are in place to revise the school's policy for teaching and learning, building on the findings from this process. Improvements to provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including how children's learning is assessed and recorded, are becoming established. A focus is also being placed on how marking can more effectively help pupils in all year groups to improve their work. Teachers have worked together to ensure that the key aspects of learning in mathematics, in each year group, are clearly defined and understood by staff. These have provided a useful first step in improving the quality of teaching in mathematics across the school which the school has rightly identified as an important priority. Actions to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality are beginning to bear fruit, as evidenced by a decline in pupils' overall levels of absence from school.

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:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the governing body in monitoring the progress made by the school against each aspect in the school improvement plan
- ensure there is a clear focus in the school improvement plan on the proportion of pupils who senior leaders expect to exceed national rates of progress, and on the performance of particular groups of pupils, including those in receipt of the pupil premium
- ensure that all staff understand what is required to teach good and outstanding lessons, including in mathematics.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI will visit the school in the autumn term to evaluate the extent of further progress made by the school in addressing the areas for improvement from the recent inspection.

### **External support**

The school draws effectively on support from a number of other local schools in order to observe examples of good practice. In addition, the local authority is providing useful support and challenge for the school, including through the school's 'achievement partner'. The first meeting of the school's 'monitoring and support group', which includes a representative from the diocese, is due to take place later this term.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of the Department for Education in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and to the Director of Children's Services for Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**