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9 July 2013

Mrs Helen Underwood
Headteacher
St Teresa of Lisieux Catholic Primary School
Utting Avenue East,
Norris Green
L11 1DB

Dear Mrs Underwood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Teresa of Lisieux Catholic Primary School, Liverpool

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

Evidence

- During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Archdiocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also took a tour of the school and looked at pupils' work in a range of subjects and from different year groups.

Main findings

The school community has been rocked by a number of tragic misfortunes during this academic year. The headteacher, supported by the local parish priest, has handled matters with care and sensitivity; she has done well to restore professional equilibrium.

School leaders feel that the previous inspection has provided the impetus for a renewed focus on school improvement and they have successfully united staff in this common purpose. The action plan, while it requires some refinement, is well-focused; it provides a clear 'road map' with timescales and measurable milestones. As such, it is a helpful tool for the school to know where it is going, how to get there and whether it has been successful. The school has made a start on its journey to becoming a good school, but there remain some barriers and it is not quite moving as fast as it ought to, or school leaders want it to.

School leaders have increased the frequency of lesson observations. Weekly 'learning walks' are already providing evidence of improvements in the quality of teaching. Teachers now observe other teachers, so that they can share ideas and learn from each other. School leaders have also increased their focus on the quality of marking. A particularly effective technique has been getting teachers to examine other teachers' marking; this has shown all staff just how effective marking can, and should, be. However, although the standard of marking has improved, there is still some poor practice. Some teachers are, as one member of staff put it, 'letting the side down', and are not yet following the new school policy.

Pupils have noticed improvements in teaching since the inspection. They say that they have more opportunity to work independently. For example, as one pupil said to me during this visit: 'In literacy...we have to work in groups as detectives to solve mysteries – this has helped us to be more creative and we all get to work together – this develops our team-working skills.' Pupils say that their work is marked more frequently. Pupils particularly appreciate the school's efforts to improve attendance. They speak highly of the chance they have to win valuable prizes if they attend school regularly and arrive on time. This scheme has already helped to improve attendance since the inspection; attendance is now only slightly below the national average.

The senior leadership team has clarified the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. Training has been provided for subject leaders. You and your deputy have accompanied the subject leaders on visits to local schools to observe good practice and gain practical advice on how to improve. These visits have formed the basis of productive dialogue between members of staff, helping to raise expectations as to what is possible. However, middle leaders are still not held to account sufficiently for the progress of pupils in their area of responsibility.

A remarkably assertive and astute governing body plays a strong and pro-active role in driving the school forward. Governors bring a wide range of expertise from the outside world and have benefitted from extensive training provided by the local authority and the National College of School Leaders. The governing body crackles with ambition and determination to accept no excuses; as they say 'we have to give these children the opportunity to have their life chances enriched by an outstanding education'. Governors set testing targets for the headteacher and confidently use the tools available to them to drive improvement. For example, new procedures for appraisal, in operation from September, will greatly support school leaders in holding teachers to account even more effectively for the progress of their pupils.

Assessment procedures at present lack rigour and consistency. School leaders have challenging conversations with class teachers about pupil progress. However, this does not happen frequently enough. Therefore, some pupils fall behind for too long and it is more difficult for them to catch up, despite the intensive support that is provided.

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:

- make assessment arrangements more consistent and transparent, so that school leaders know that assessment information is reliable and accurate
- increase the intensity and regularity of checking up on pupils' progress so that action can be taken even more rapidly to prevent pupils from underachieving
- ensure that systems for performance management hold middle leaders to account for driving improvement in their area of responsibility
- ensure the action plan addresses more effectively weaknesses in mathematics
- make sure all teachers follow school policies on assessment, marking and lesson planning consistently so that pupils' progress improves at a faster pace.

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 has provided effective support for the school. Links have been established with local good and outstanding schools which have helped to raise expectations and also increase the expertise of subject leaders in their area of responsibility. Governors have benefitted from training organised by the local authority. Visits of the school improvement officer have helped the school to have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses, at the same time as supporting the school in clearly identifying the next steps in improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool and as below.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector