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17 July 2013

Mr Gerry O'Brien  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Rigby Street  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR1 5XL

Dear Mr O'Brien

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Preston, Lancashire**

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, the Vice Chair of Governors and teachers with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. I also met with two representatives from the local authority. You accompanied me on a tour of the school where I had the opportunity to meet a number of your colleagues and observe pupils engaged in purposeful learning. This was particularly the case in the nursery and Reception Year, with children captivated by the range of activities they had been given to do.

I analysed the school's development plan and associated documents, written in response to the findings of the Ofsted inspection. I also examined the work in a sample of pupils' books so that I could assess the quality of marking.

### **Context**

You became headteacher of St Joseph's at the start of the academic year and since then you have carried out a thorough review of the staffing structure. This has enabled you to assess how well your colleagues are deployed and to make appropriate changes with the

intention of maximising pupils' achievement. Since the inspection the teacher with responsibility for Key Stage 1 has, unavoidably, had to leave her post. Three other teachers are also leaving the school at the end of the summer term. Four teachers will be joining the staff in September. One teacher will be working in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a second in Key Stage 1, a third will be working with the team of staff responsible for Year 3 and Year 4 pupils and the fourth with the team responsible for pupils in Years 5 and 6.

## **Main findings**

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority agree that the findings of the recent inspection are an accurate reflection of the stage the school is at on its journey of improvement.

Soon after arriving at the school you identified that teachers' lesson planning was more rigorous in some key stages than it was in others. You found examples of plans that did not take sufficient account of pupils' learning needs, particularly more able pupils. Consequently pupils made better progress in some year groups, for example in Years 3 and 4 than they did in others, for example Year 5. You took rapid action to address this by introducing a new and effective strategy for planning. This new approach ensures that teachers and pupils are clear about what the learning intentions are in each lesson. It also enables teachers to plan the next steps in learning to allow all pupils to make better progress. Although it is too early to assess the impact this methodology is having on pupils' achievement, you have evidence that the quality of teaching is improving and pupils are becoming more confident and independent learners as a result. However you are acutely aware that there is still work to be done to embed this way of planning with some of your colleagues to enable teaching to become, at least, consistently good across the school.

Senior leaders monitoring of teaching and learning is becoming more rigorous with staff being held increasingly to account for the standards achieved by their pupils. The new staff structure has enabled groups of professionals within a key stage to work closely together and share their good practice. This collective approach is having a positive impact on raising the quality of teachers' work in the classroom, particularly in relation to the teaching of writing. However temporary teachers, employed by governors to cover long term staff absence, are not subject to the same level of scrutiny and support. Consequently, the progress of pupils taught by some of these teachers is not as rapid as it could be.

You have plans to further address the weaknesses in the teaching of reading and mathematics, identified in the previous inspection report. From the start of the autumn term policies aimed at ensuring the consistency of classroom practice and designed to accelerate pupils' achievement in both subjects will be in place. Teachers will be helped to implement these policies by undertaking a programme of training.

Senior leaders are taking effective steps to improve behaviour. Staff with responsibility for pupil welfare have received guidance in organising activities for the pupils at playtimes. As a result many pupils play supervised games with clear sets of rules. Consequently there are opportunities for staff to reinforce with the pupils values of respect and fair play. The impact of this initiative has been improved behaviour around the school, with pupils demonstrating greater appreciation and tolerance of each other. The introduction of 'Golden Time' as a reward for pupils who have behaved well by supporting and helping others, during the week, has also positively impacted on behaviour.

The school development plan is well written. The priorities to improve the school have been correctly identified and the actions to achieve these priorities are clear and set within realistic timescales. However, a number of the measures by which governors will determine the impact of the development plan are not sharp enough. In addition there is a lack of clarity around who is responsible for monitoring that the actions taken to improve the school are being effective.

Senior leaders have carried out a review of the school's marking policy and as a result pupils' books are marked regularly. Teachers' comments praise work that has been done well. However, not enough marking provides pupils with clear guidance about how their work could be improved. When this guidance is provided it is often not followed up so opportunities are missed for pupils' to correct their mistakes and learn from them.

The governors are united behind your vision for improving the school. They value the management information they receive from senior leaders. However, they are aware that they need to continue to develop their own systems for independently collecting information about the operation of the school so that they can robustly hold senior leaders to account for the impact of their management practices and the standards achieved by the pupils.

Having reviewed the evidence made available to me I consider that senior leaders and governors are taking effective steps to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all teachers use the recently introduced strategy for planning lessons and schemes of work, effectively. Making sure that the needs of all groups of learners and in particular more able pupils are catered for
- ensure that temporary teachers are supported and monitored as rigorously as permanent members of staff
- sharpen the school development plan so that the governors are able to measure the impact of the actions taken to improve the school on pupils' outcomes
- clarify who is responsible for monitoring the progress being made against each of the targets in the development plan so that the staff responsible for delivering these targets can be held to account
- embed the school's marking policy so that staff give pupils clear guidance about what they need to do to improve their work and make sure that pupils act on the advice they are given
- ensure that governors receive additional training to enable them to hold leaders and managers more robustly to account for the smooth operation of the school and the standards achieved by pupils.

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 continues to provide effective support to senior leaders in their drive to improve the school. Representatives from human resources have worked effectively with you and the governors to resolve staffing issues and bring greater stability to the staff team. The behaviour consultant has carried out a review of the school's behaviour policy and

provided valuable advice and guidance which has resulted in improved behaviour around the school. The attendance consultant is currently working with pastoral staff to actively engage hard to reach families and stress the importance of their children's regular attendance. The school adviser has worked effectively with you to refine the school development plan ensuring it includes the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**