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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 26 September 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.

This visit was the second 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.

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 sure that teachers continue to receive training to effectively implement the published schemes the school has chosen to use for teaching literacy and numeracy. Ensuring that resources are appropriately adapted to meet the needs and aspirations of all pupils
- strengthen the written behaviour management policy so that the guidelines for the use of pupil restraint are sufficiently detailed and that the formal system for recording when restraint is used is fully implemented, as appropriate, by all staff.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also held separate meetings with three members of your management team, four classroom teachers and four colleagues who work in the school as teaching assistants. I took the opportunity to find out how the children feel about behaviour in the school by meeting with a class of Year 5 pupils.

I had a conversation with a member of the governing body and I also spoke with a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised the school's behaviour policy, which has been in place since the start of this term. I also made a number of short visits to lessons, accompanied by the deputy headteacher, in order to determine the impact that the introduction of new literacy and numeracy schemes are having on the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2.

Context

At my previous visit you indicated that there would be a number of staff changes in September. These have now taken place with three teachers, five teaching assistants and two members of the business administration team leaving the school at the end of the summer term. In September five teachers joined the staff. This has enabled you to deploy one new teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage, another in Key Stage 1, a third to work in Years' 3 and 4 and a fourth to work in Years' 5 and 6. The fifth new teacher has been given responsibility for developing a support group for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

The vacancies in the business administration team have yet to be filled and you intend appointing a further two teachers to strengthen staffing and help you and your colleagues meet key priorities, related to improving pupils' achievement, in the school's development plan.

Main findings

Since my previous visit the school's Key Stage 2 results for 2013 have become available. Attainment in mathematics improved in 2013 compared to what it was in 2012. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 and above increasing by nine percentage points to 73% and there has been an increase of seven percentage points in the proportion of pupils making expected progress. Although both figures remain below national averages this improvement suggests that the actions you have targeted in this area are now starting to have an impact. Achievement in reading is also showing signs of improvement with one third of pupils making better than expected progress by the end of Year 6. However, results in English were disappointing in 2013 and you are acutely aware that there is still significant work to be done to improve the quality of teaching in order to continue to raise standards across all subjects.

In an attempt to accelerate pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy you have recently started to use published teaching schemes for both subjects. The intention is that these give teachers a clear structure to follow when they teach their lessons and as a consequence improve their practice. Observations of the teaching of writing at Key Stage 2 however, show that teachers are following the scheme too rigidly. There is little evidence that activities are adjusted to meet the various needs of the different groups of pupils in the class. In addition teachers' slavish adherence to the scheme is appearing to stifle both theirs' and pupils' creativity. As a consequence although this approach is intended, quite rightly to improve pupils' writing in terms of its organisation and structure it is not sufficiently firing their imaginations. In contrast, in the one numeracy lesson I observed the teacher adopted a much more flexible approach creating a lively atmosphere for learning. The pupils undertaking various activities targeted at their current stage of understanding of

the subject. However, even this lesson could have been improved if some of the activities had been more challenging.

The staff who joined the school in September have enabled you to provide settled staffing arrangements for all classes. As a consequence the pupils are experiencing much more consistency in terms of teaching approaches than was the case last year. This was a period when the governors, unavoidably, had to employ the services of a number of temporary teachers to make sure that the curriculum was covered. The revised staff structure, in place at the time of my previous visit, is becoming established. The staff that I spoke to have welcomed the new ways of working. Regular meetings between teachers and teaching assistants, for example, ensure clear lines of communication and enable them to jointly plan learning activities. As a result teaching assistants are having a greater impact on pupils' progress than has hitherto been the case. However, the implementation of the new structure has not been without its problems and you are successfully overcoming some resistance from colleagues who have found adapting to these new and innovative ways of working, challenging.

Working with the local authority's behaviour consultant, all members of staff have undertaken training in behaviour management including accepted techniques for restraining children, should the need arise. However, this aspect of the school's written behaviour policy is not detailed enough and provides insufficient guidance for staff new to the school. In addition staff are not using the formalised system for recording such incidents when they occur. Consequently, there is no accurate and written record of when staff have had to intervene to prevent a child hurting themselves or possibly others.

The strategies you have put in place to improve behaviour continue to have a positive impact. Almost all of the pupils I met with during my visit agree that behaviour has improved in the last year and most say that they are fairly treated by their teachers and other adults who work with them. As a result the large majority of these pupils said that they feel safe in school. Although the organised activities available for pupils at playtimes are improving behaviour out of class, pupils said that behaviour is most likely to fall below the standards expected in the playground. Consequently it is during morning break and lunchtime when relationships between some pupils are at their most fractious.

The governors continue to be supportive of you and your colleagues in your drive to improve the school. They are very aware of the difficulties you have faced in implementing the new staffing structure and have welcomed the timely and effective support of human resources at the local authority in helping you resolve them. In view of the short space of time between my first and second visits governors have still to undertake training to enable them to hold senior leaders more robustly to account for the operation of the school.

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 is playing an active and effective role with senior leaders and governors in steering the school's journey of improvement. Human resources have supported the implementation of the new staff structure and continue to be an effective source of advice in resolving any remaining personnel issues. Advisers from the local authority's monitoring

and intervention team have assisted senior leaders in a number of ways. For example they have provided support to write and implement an effective new behaviour policy and are helping the school's drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

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