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Mrs Galbraith
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland
Rutland Street
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR4 6HY

Dear Mrs Galbraith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 November 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:

- ensure subject and other leaders have accurate and sufficient evidence to show the impact of their work on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils
- include teaching assistants in pupil progress meetings so they are also held to account for the progress pupils make in the groups for which they are responsible.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you, other senior and subject leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the School Improvement Partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and looked at a range of documents including minutes of governing body meetings, the outcomes of

monitoring activities, data on pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work. You accompanied me on a tour of the school.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2013, there has been considerable staffing disruption. One teacher is absent on maternity leave. Two teachers have been on long term sickness absence, one of whom has just returned although not yet to full-time working. A teaching assistant has also been on sickness absence. There are now two permanent teachers job sharing, rather than one permanent and one temporary member of staff. There have been a number of supply teachers covering the absences.

Main findings

You, other leaders and governors are showing by your actions a commitment to improving the school. The new action plan contains suitable measurable targets and clear milestones so that progress can be tracked. The plan contains appropriate activities to address the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection.

You have taken steps to improve the way teachers track pupils' progress. The move to half-termly checks is much more effective. Consequently, teachers are now held more fully to account for the progress pupils make in the half-termly progress meetings. Your analysis of data has enabled you to identify any pupils or groups of pupils who are underachieving and appropriate support is now being provided to help these pupils improve, often with the support provided by teaching assistants. However, because teaching assistants are not included in the pupil progress meetings, they are not being held accountable for the progress these pupils make. Teachers are increasingly aware they are responsible when pupils do not reach the standards expected of them. Those pupils who are on track to exceed their targets are given more aspirational targets to challenge them further.

The additional monitoring of teaching and learning is to be welcomed. There is now greater rigour in checking whether teachers are meeting their performance management targets. After each observation or scrutiny of work, targets are identified for teachers to improve their teaching and these are recorded and followed up by the headteacher to check they have been met. Monitoring records for this term show lesson observations by senior leaders are closely focused on the quality of pupils' learning and are more evaluative of the progress pupils are making. However, although it is early days, subject and other leaders do not have sufficient evidence to show they are having a marked impact on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils in their subject areas.

Governors now have a greater understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors ask challenging questions in order to hold you and other leaders to

account. This more insightful understanding is, in part, the result of first-hand visits to the school so that governors can see for themselves how well pupils are learning. They also now join in staff training sessions. For example, the governor who has responsibility for checking the progress of pupils who have English as an additional language attended a training session provided by the local authority on how to improve provision for these pupils. This has helped him to have a clearer focus on what he is looking for when checking the work 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 has established a 'Headteacher's Challenge Group' which meets half-termly to challenge and support the school to improve. This group is providing a coordinated approach to the support provided so that it is targeted specifically to where it is needed and so there is not an overlap. The School Improvement Partner, who is also the headteacher of Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School in Gateshead, is supporting the school in developing the skills of subject and other leaders in checking and evaluating the work in their subjects or areas of responsibility. This is in the early stages; however, some impact can be seen in the improvements in pupils' work but further progress is required. The local authority has brokered support through the St John Bosco Roman Catholic Primary School Teaching Alliance which is providing support to staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum. Staff have already visited St John Bosco Roman Catholic Primary School to observe good practice to help improve their teaching and to discuss ways of implementing the new primary curriculum. This is already helping staff to make important changes to the range of subjects being taught.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Sunderland local authority and the Director of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector