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28 March 2014

Mrs Ann Taylor  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Infant School  
Hazell Avenue  
Aylesbury  
HP21 7JF

Dear Mrs Taylor

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Infant School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 March 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 January 2014. 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:

- sharpen the action plan so it includes measurable outcomes for pupils and demonstrates clearly who is accountable for implementing actions and who is to evaluate how well the outcomes for pupils are met
- ensure members of the governing body take a more active role in the monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the action plan. Additional school documentation was scrutinised including subject leaders' action plans, leaders' observations of lessons and other monitoring of teaching, local authority notes of visit and minutes of governing body meetings. I also conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work. You and I made a tour of the school and discussed the action taken since the last inspection.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection one member of the teaching staff has left. A teacher has been appointed for the remainder of the academic year. A new foundation governor, representing the diocese, has been appointed.

## **Main findings**

You and other leaders have responded promptly to the findings of the section 5 report. Some of the improvement work required had begun prior to the inspection, following a local authority review and leaders' own self-evaluation. You, governors and local authority members feel the judgements of the inspection reflect your own evaluations. Staff have now begun to work together to address the areas requiring improvement and there is a renewed sense of energy throughout the school.

The school's action plan is comprehensive and priorities are appropriately matched to the areas requiring improvement. The actions identified are suitable and staggered appropriately over the school year. The plan makes it clear who is responsible for implementing the scheduled actions. Leaders have made good use of a variety of external support to build capacity and to address each of the areas identified for improvement. However, while the plan clarifies who will lead each strategy; it is unclear who will monitor its effectiveness and how success will be measured. Where success measures are identified, these are not aligned closely enough to outcomes for pupils. The action plan should now be strengthened to include pupil attainment and progress measures; this will then allow leaders to quantify the impact they are having on pupils' learning.

You and other senior leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching. In particular, you have successfully utilised support and training to improve the teaching of writing. This involves a mix of coaching by expert teachers; attending training; observing other teachers to identify good aspects of teaching; and teaching lessons alongside another teacher. An experienced mentor from a local teaching school is supporting the newly qualified teacher effectively. Teaching is

being monitored and leaders' judgements have been endorsed by the local authority. Recently the school has experienced an unsettled time with a high level of staff absence for a variety of reasons; however, staffing stability is now improving.

The deputy headteacher has recently taken on the additional responsibility of leading literacy. Already improvements are emerging; teaching now places a greater emphasis on providing models of writing to help pupils understand what is expected of them. Leaders are beginning to introduce different ways of working; teachers have recently undergone effective training that has included work sampling and support for their planning. Pupils' work demonstrates that a greater emphasis has been placed on improving sentences and that there are more frequent opportunities for extended writing, although it is too early to judge the impact of these strategies.

Well-judged plans to develop teachers' marking are being established but these are at a very early stage; senior leaders acknowledge that marking remains variable across the school. A sensible cycle of moderation to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' progress is underway.

A useful partnership with a local teaching school has been established and work has begun to develop subject leadership so that it has an impact on improving teaching and learning. Subject leaders' action plans have been revised and the headteacher has revisited with staff, the schools' expectations of a subject leader. As a result, subject leaders are beginning to make use of data about pupils' progress to inform their evaluations more effectively.

The governing body is relatively inexperienced; a new chair was appointed in September and the vast majority of governors have recently joined. Governors have received the action plan and are keenly focused on developing their understanding of their role and responsibilities. However, their capacity to evaluate the school's effectiveness needs to be addressed urgently, so they are better placed to offer challenge and support, and I am pleased that a programme of training is planned.

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**

In addition to support for senior leaders, the school improvement partner has worked effectively with the school on its action plan. It has brokered effective support from other local schools to improve teaching, particularly of writing. As a result, teachers have received the opportunity to see good quality teaching of writing at two local schools. More opportunities to work with external consultants are planned and are closely aligned to the areas requiring improvement. As noted above, the governors would benefit from more specific support to assist them in

their role of providing challenge and support to the school's leaders and in evaluating the school's effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**