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6 June 2014

Mrs J Walling  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster  
Aldrens Lane  
Lancaster  
Lancashire  
LA1 2DU

Dear Mrs Walling

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

Following my visit to your school on 5 June 2014, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- urgently capitalise on the opportunities presented by permanent staff from September 2013 to lift the quality of teaching so that all matches the best in the school
- check school data more closely to identify achievement gaps between pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium and other pupils in the school and target support swiftly to eradicate differences
- build on the work which has started recently to ensure disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs receive the right support to make the best possible progress from their starting points.

## **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, current senior leaders and the recently appointed leadership team which will take up post in September. I also met with four members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. We watched six lessons led by six teachers and we observed teachers and teaching assistants delivering small groups phonics sessions (phonics is the teaching of sounds and the letters they make). I met with a small group of older pupils to find out their views about the changes you have made since the last inspection. School data, including the 2013 results, were scrutinised. I also considered your checks on teaching.

## **Context**

There has been considerable staff change since the school was inspected in January 2013. Three teachers resigned, the acting deputy headteacher took extended leave and one member of staff was absent for a long period of time. Out of the eight classes, six have been taught by temporary teachers at some point since the previous inspection. In some instances, classes have had a number of different supply teachers, some for varying periods of time. A senior teacher, from a local school, was seconded to the school as acting deputy headteacher in September 2013. This arrangement ends at the end of the academic year. A new Chair of Governors and two new members of the governing body have taken up post.

At the time of my visit, a senior leader had returned to work following a period of extended leave, the Reception teacher has taken extended leave and another member of staff is absent long term. Nursery, Reception, Year 3 and Year 5 are being taught by temporary teachers. Appointments have been confirmed for September which means the leadership team will be extended and the majority of classes will be taught by permanent teachers in the new academic year.

## **Main findings**

The period since the last inspection has been challenging and fraught with difficulties. Nonetheless, your determination to improve the school has not faltered; you have picked yourself up after each setback, refocused your efforts and set about working to tackle the school's shortcomings. Despite knowing what to do and taking the right action to bring about improvement, your work has not borne enough fruit. This is largely due to circumstances beyond your control. The school's journey to good is being hampered by the significant staffing issues that you have faced before and since the inspectors left the school in January. Progress in lifting the quality of teaching and raising the achievement of all pupils across the school has faltered because of staff changes and absence.

Although you are successful in ensuring teachers are in place on a day-to-day basis, too much time is spent fire-fighting and your resources to support teachers are being spread too thin. The constant stream of temporary teachers means you

continually have to backtrack to bring new teachers up to speed, only for them to be replaced, and for you to have to start the process over again. As a result, you have found yourself frequently returning to the starting blocks rather than motoring forward with your action plan.

You have kept pupils' achievement as your top priority. Consequently, achievement has not slipped backwards. The 2013 results show Year 6 pupils made better progress than they have done in the past. However, standards at the end of Year 2 are still well below average. The current Year 3 pupils were not ready for Key Stage 2 because they were almost a year behind in their learning. Although improving, not enough pupils are successful with the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Your own data show most pupils are making typical progress at this point in the year; some are making greater gains in their learning. However, not enough pupils, across all classes, are making the rapid progress needed to help them reach the standards expected for their age. Pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium lag behind their classmates by over a year. It is not obvious if this gap is closing because your analysis of data does not go far enough in identifying gaps and checking your strategies to raise the achievement of this group are making a difference. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs are not doing as well as others in the school because the quality and quantity of support they receive has not been good enough over time.

The governing body and local authority share your concern for the slow progress in tackling all the issues identified at the last inspection. However, there are signs that the tide is beginning to turn. The recent successful recruitment drive mean there are permanent teachers in Years 4 and 6 and new members of staff, including those with key leadership responsibilities, are ready to take up post in September. This is lifting morale and building confidence. Time will tell if these changes live up to your expectations. However, it does mean staffing will be on an even keel for the first time in a number of years and there will be more leaders to shoulder the responsibility for improvement.

There is work to do to lift the quality of teaching across the school. Nonetheless, teaching is better on a day-to-day basis in those classes where teachers have stayed the course. This is because of the training they receive and the advice and guidance you give following frequent checks on teaching. The teaching of phonics is getting better because it has become a daily routine. Your investment in training teaching assistants is paying dividends; they have a much better understanding of their role which is improving their skills in supporting pupils in class and during small group sessions. Teachers' marking is much stronger because it helps pupils know what they need to do to improve. Well presented pupils' books point to teachers' higher expectations and pupils' increasing pride in their work. In contrast, pupils' progress is hampered in some classes by weak basic skills. In others, pupils are gaining the mechanics of writing but too little attention is given to writing with flair or helping pupils produce work that appeals to a reader.

Pupils recognise teachers are trying hard to make learning more interesting and that the teachers have pupils' best interests at heart. Pupils say they work harder than they used to in the past but they are not always asked to do their very best.

The governing body have come on leaps and bounds since my last visit. They have an honest and astute understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they visit school more frequently, they have a good grasp of data and they attend meetings which look at the core business of teaching and pupils' achievement. As a result, they are asking well informed and challenging questions and are taking an instrumental role in tackling the staffing issues which have hindered your success.

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 responded well to your calls for support. It brokered the secondment of a senior leader from a local school to help build leadership capacity. The training programme to support teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is helping to improve this area of the school. Support for phonics teaching means the number of pupils likely to meet the screening check this year is an improvement on past performance. Local authority officers attend governing body meetings to support governors in developing their understanding of data. They also meet with you frequently to check your progress and to work with you in reducing barriers to progress. The local authority is as disappointed as you that not all of this work has made a big enough difference. This is because its efforts have also been thwarted by the high staff turnover since the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**