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3 July 2014

Mr M Ewing  
Headteacher  
St Catherine's RC Primary School  
Greystoke Gardens  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
Tyne and Wear  
NE2 1PS

Dear Mr Ewing

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Catherine's RC Primary School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2014, accompanied by Lee Owston HMI, 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 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority 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 that all teaching, including through the impact of marking and feedback, continues to build on the best practice in the school. Make sure that the support provided for new staff joining in September helps them to meet the school's expectations quickly and effectively
- further improve the impact of leaders' checks on pupils' work to ensure that improvement points for teachers are followed up promptly and rigorously.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and with other school leaders. Inspectors also observed learning in every class in the school (except in Year 6, where pupils were out of school attending induction events), scrutinised many examples of pupils' work and looked at assessment data provided by class teachers and school leaders. Records of the school's own monitoring of teaching and work scrutiny were also examined.

## **Context**

Three new teachers are due to join the school in September and, as a result, there will be some reorganisation of areas of leadership responsibility. Since the last monitoring inspection, two new governors have joined the governing body.

## **Main findings**

Inspection evidence confirms your view that improvements in pupils' learning and in the quality of their work are evident in nearly all year groups. This is because more teaching is now good or better and the impact of improvements to marking and feedback are having a notable impact on pupils' achievement. You believe that the early indications of end of Key Stage assessments for 2014 also show this improvement. A scrutiny of tracking data for each class indicates that more pupils are now making expected, and better than expected, rates of progress. School data also shows that the differences in attainment between pupils supported through the pupil premium and pupils that are not are closing. In addition, there are improvements evident in other aspects of the school's work, such as levels of attendance which are now close to the national average for primary schools.

The following features of teaching were seen to have a positive impact on pupils' learning:

- High expectations and good levels of challenge for all groups of pupils, in all classes, right up from the Early Years Foundation Stage
- a strong focus on subject vocabulary, boosting pupils' confidence in explaining their learning and supporting better writing
- an emphasis on learning in interesting and engaging contexts
- teaching that helps pupils solve problems, grasp mathematical ideas and understand concepts as well as building their skills and knowledge
- effective questioning that develops pupils' understanding and expects more detailed responses
- good use of pupils' mistakes and misconceptions to help them to deepen their learning and improve their work.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not pick up quickly enough on the mistakes pupils make, or make clear enough in their planning where learning will be developed. Sometimes opportunities to use activities in 'topic' lessons to strengthen pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are missed.

The impact of improvements to marking and feedback are evident in most classes. However, although all pupils' work is regularly marked, there remains a little variability in the quality of teachers' written feedback across the school. The best marking is making a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Pupils are used to responding to the feedback in their books and time is set aside in lessons for them to do so. For example, in Year 6, marking uses the 'pink highlighter' approach very effectively: the advice provided by the teacher targets very precisely how pupils can improve their work and deepen their understanding.

By comparison, in some other examples, the advice given is not always specific enough or does not get sufficiently to the heart of pupils' misunderstanding or misconceptions. In a very few instances, inspectors came across pupils' responses to marking that had not been followed up and where the pupil had repeated a mistake or misconception, thereby reinforcing the error the pupil had made.

The leadership of teaching is increasingly effective. Leaders use a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and ensure that these 'join up' to provide a rounded picture of teacher effectiveness. Areas for development, identified following lesson observations, are routinely followed up with further support and checks from school leaders. Samples of pupils' work are looked at regularly to check on the impact of marking and identify how learning can be improved. These checks are helping to pinpoint subject-specific improvements, as well as provide tailored feedback for individual teachers. Leaders recognise that the next step is to ensure that feedback from work scrutiny is followed up as rigorously as evidence from observations of teaching. Middle leaders are contributing well to these improvements, although the leadership of literacy is not as strong as for mathematics. A good range of support and training, particularly opportunities arranged through the partner school link, are helping teachers to improve their confidence and expertise. Portfolios of good practice, gathered from classes across the school, ensure that everybody feels part of the improvement process. You recognise that, when three new teachers join the school in September, you will need to ensure they are enabled to meet your expectations quickly and effectively.

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 very effective support and challenge to the school, particularly through the work of the monitoring and support group. The link with St John Bosco RC Primary School in Sunderland is proving especially valuable. Brokered through the diocese, this link is providing good support for governance, leadership and teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of the Department for Education in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and to the Director of Children's Services for Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**