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15 July 2014

Mrs Moira Maughan  
Headteacher  
St James' CofE Junior School  
Wellington Row  
Whitehaven  
Cumbria  
CA28 7HG

Dear Mrs Maughan

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James' CofE Junior School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your school on 14 July 2014, 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 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:

- bring the quality of all teaching in the school up to the standard of the best, by making sure that teachers use the information they have about their pupils' ability to plan activities that are suitably challenging, making pupils think hard about what they are doing in order to deepen their understanding
- continue to improve the quality of marking so that teachers comments make absolutely clear how a piece of work can be improved and then making sure that pupils act on their teachers' advice
- analyse the reasons why the proportion of Year 6 pupils making more than expected progress in mathematics declined this year. Then put in place appropriate steps to ensure that this decline is reversed, paying particular attention to pupils eligible for free school meals and middle ability girls.

## **Evidence**

During this visit I met with you, the teachers who have responsibility for English, mathematics and the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 and the local authority adviser who is supporting your work to improve the school. I also held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and a group of Year 5 pupils who were willing to share with me their experiences of what it is like to learn at St. James'.

I made a number of short visits to lessons where I witnessed pupils engaged in activities related to literacy and one class undertaking a scientific investigation. I scrutinised a number of school documents including your evaluation of how well the school is doing, the school's post Ofsted action plan redesigned and reviewed since my previous visit, senior leaders' records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's behaviour log. I also examined the work in a sample of books from pupils in Year 3 and Year 6. This was so that I could evaluate the quality of teachers' marking, its impact on pupils' progress and the quality of pupils' writing.

## **Context**

Since my previous visit two permanent members of staff have returned from maternity leave and two teachers have left the school, including the deputy headteacher. The governors have acted quickly to fill the senior leader vacancy and a new deputy headteacher will be joining the staff in September. The new vicar of St. James' Parish Church, Whitehaven has joined the governing body and you have appointed a midday supervisor.

## **Main findings**

The areas of concern that I identified at my previous visit, which were hampering your work to improve the school are being effectively addressed. Your evaluation of how well the school is doing is now sharper. You have used a range of evidence to inform your judgements about how well you and your colleagues are addressing the areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted report. This self-evaluation has then been used to help senior leaders formulate the revised post-Ofsted action plan. This plan clearly identifies the school's development priorities, the actions that will be taken to address them and milestones to enable senior leaders and governors to gauge the progress they are making on their journey to improve the school.

Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of literacy teaching, identified as an area for improvement at the school's previous inspection, has reaped rewards in the end of Key Stage 2 tests this year. With most pupils attaining at least level 4 in each of the literacy related subjects and more than half attaining the higher Level 5 in reading and spelling, punctuation and grammar. This improvement in attainment is also mirrored by improvements in the progress pupils made in reading and writing. In writing, for example, just over one third of pupils made more than expected progress, which is 26 percentage points higher than it was last year. In reading the improvement on this measure was six percentage points. However, whilst these results are encouraging you are aware that your colleagues need to accelerate pupils' progress in literacy even more if they are to bring the school's results in line with those across the country.

The end of Year 6 results in mathematics however, are disappointing with attainment and progress measures declining from what they were in 2013. The subject coordinators' analysis of the reasons for the decline in these results has identified middle ability girls and pupils eligible for free school meals as having under-performed.

Learning from this year's experience senior leaders have devised a strategy for providing Year 6 pupils with much more intensive support from September. The intention is that this will enable them to quickly identify when pupils are underperforming, provide timely support to help them get back on track and ultimately raise attainment further.

Senior leaders work to improve the quality of teaching is increasingly effective. Turbulence in staffing due to a number of unavoidable absences is beginning to calm as permanent members of staff return to the school. In addition senior leaders have taken the necessary steps to eradicate inadequate teaching. However, you are aware that there is still work to be done to bring all teaching in the school up to the standard of the best. For example pupils' learn best and make the most rapid progress when the work they are given to do is matched to their ability. There is evidence that in some lessons all pupils are given the same tasks, consequently these activities can lack challenge for more able pupils and be too hard for weaker ones. As a result the progress of both groups slows.

The quality of marking has continued to improve since my previous visit. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and often. In the best examples teachers describe the strengths of a piece of work and then provide clear guidance as to how it can be improved, which pupils then act on. However, some teachers' comments still lack precision and as a result pupils do not have enough information to enable them to refine their work, make it better and so learn from their mistakes.

Pupils' relationships with each other and their teachers are cordial and friendly, which contributes to a calm atmosphere for learning. The pupils I spoke to said that they feel safe. They believe bullying to be rare but should it occur feel confident that it would be dealt with effectively by the adults who work with them. During my short visits to lessons I noticed that pupils' attitudes to learning were positive, willingly engaging with the tasks they were given to do and waiting patiently while their teacher allocated the next activity.

The external review of governance recommended by inspectors at the school's most recent inspection has been carried out. As a result governors' confidence to carry out their roles effectively has increased and they are taking a more active role in the life and work of the school. They have a much higher profile in the school than was the case in the past. For example members of the governing body have assisted teachers on school trips and helped in the school library. This is enabling them to gain first-hand experience of the impact that enrichment activities have on pupils' learning. Governors are now a visible presence at parents' evenings, canvassing parents and carers opinions and feeding these back to senior leaders in order to inform their work with the wider school community. Governors have completed a health and safety review and taken effective action on the findings, contributing to a safer working environment for both pupils and staff.

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 continued to provide intensive and effective support to St. James', assisting senior leaders and governors in their work to improve the school. The local authority has provided a consultant to work with staff to improve the teaching of literacy; this has led to improved results in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 2. A member of the local authority's governor support team carried out the successful review of the school's governance. The effective links the school has forged with two local successful schools, in place at the time of my previous visit, have been maintained. These links are enabling staff to share their ideas about what works best in the classroom.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria and the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Carlisle.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

**Her Majesty's Inspector**