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Mrs Celia Holder, Headteacher / Mrs Lisa Bird Acting Headteacher
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School
Furness Road
Westfield
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 3PD

Dear Mrs Holder / Mrs Bird

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 October 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:

- refine the approach to scrutinising pupils' work in order to:
 - critically evaluate the quality and range of work
 - evaluate the impact of marking
 - assess the progress pupils are making from their starting points and in relation to age related expectations
- further develop the approach to observing teaching to increase the focus on pupils' learning and progress
- track pupils' experience when they are supported through intervention groups to make sure all pupils benefit from a range of teaching and make good progress in all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, mathematics leader, middle leaders, three members of the governing body and the school's local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of pupils. The school improvement plans were evaluated and I looked at revised policies and monitoring forms that have been completed since the last inspection. I visited all classrooms during lessons, spoke to pupils and sampled their work.

Context

The assistant headteacher stepped up to the role of acting headteacher soon after the last inspection, due to the absence of the headteacher. Four teachers joined the school just before the last inspection; two are part of the senior leadership team. The teaching of mathematics has been reorganised in years 5 and 6 into three ability groups.

Main findings

You have acted quickly to tackle the areas identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection. Staff and governors have pulled together to bring about the necessary improvements. Middle leaders have welcomed the increased responsibility and all staff are keen to play their part. The school's 'rapid development plan' is well written, with clear actions to develop teaching, raise achievement and strengthen leadership. You are making good progress in reaching the plan's objectives. The focus up to now has been on revising policies and improving systems for checking the quality of teaching and progress that pupils make. It is too soon to assess the impact of changes on pupils' achievement at this stage, but the systems provide firm foundations for securing improvement.

You have made several changes to ensure teaching is consistently good and to raise achievement in mathematics. Your new approach to lesson planning shows that work is varied to make sure that the most able pupils are sufficiently challenged and support is provided for those who need more help. The revised mathematical calculation policy makes sure that knowledge and skills are taught systematically, building on pupils' previous learning.

You are taking appropriate action to help those pupils who currently have gaps in their learning because of ineffective teaching in the past. The half-termly assessments and pupil progress meetings you have introduced, are supporting teachers to keep track of pupils' progress and identify any gaps in their learning. You have planned a wide range of support and interventions for pupils who are falling behind. Teaching assistants are better deployed to support pupils, both in class and in small groups. They are receiving relevant training to help them in the new roles. There is a wide range of interventions to help pupils catch up and fill gaps in their

learning. However, it is important to maintain an oversight of the various support programmes to make sure they have the intended impact and that all pupils receive an appropriate balance of teaching from teachers and teaching assistants.

The new marking policy is being applied consistently in all classes and across all subjects. It is helping teachers to focus on the advice they provide and to make sure pupils have time to respond. This is a good start, but there is still variability in the impact of marking. Where marking is most effective, teachers provide concise and clear advice to help pupils make gains in their knowledge, extend their skills or correct errors. Occasionally, teachers' comments are too lengthy and pupils' responses are conversational, but do not lead to improvements in their work. At Key Stage 1, the use of files to keep pupils' work in makes it difficult for pupils to look back at comments.

During my visits to classrooms, pupils were co-operative and attentive. Those I spoke to said they can usually get on with their work without interruption and they feel safe and secure around school. They feel their school is 'kind and caring' and are very positive about teachers, saying they take time to 'really help you understand even if it takes 50 explanations!' Occasionally pupils find responding to marking boring. Now that the policy is established it would be helpful to evaluate what pupils find most useful to help them improve.

The improvement points for leadership from the last inspection focused on action planning and procedures to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. You have produced a 'rapid development plan' that is much more incisive with measurable success criteria so you can check progress through the year. The action plans to improve governance, literacy, mathematics and the early years prioritise appropriate actions.

Procedures to observe lessons and check pupils' work have improved. Work scrutiny and observations are more frequent and are undertaken by a wider range of staff, including subject leaders. In the initial stages, observations and work scrutiny have focused on whether teachers and pupils are following school policies. Now that these policies are established, there is a need to focus more explicitly on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress.

Leaders at all levels are being empowered to take a more active role in leading improvement through training and links with other schools. Leaders have welcomed the increased responsibility and accountability and have risen to the challenges. Governors have similarly welcomed their increased role in supporting and challenging school leaders. The recent review of governors' roles has ensured that their skills are used to best effect and they have a better understanding of the key priorities. Governors have recently forged links with subject leaders and regular visits to school keep them better-informed. They have benefitted from training on data and from links with governors of other schools.

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 school is drawing on external support effectively. The local authority acted quickly to broker links with other schools. The links with St Patrick's Roman Catholic School are proving beneficial in enabling governors, leaders and teachers to develop their skills and learn from each other. Opportunities for moderation of pupils' work within the Workington cluster are also helpful. The local authority adviser has provided effective advice and support since the school was identified as needing targeted support in September 2014.

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 Roman Catholic Diocese of Lancaster.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector