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Mrs Jane Smith
The Headteacher
St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School
Magdalen Road
St Leonards-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN37 6EU

Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 February 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 November 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 develop an action plan which:

- shows clearly, for each of the areas identified for improvement, the action to be taken and how success will be measured, including by governors
- includes targets set for the achievement of under-achieving groups of pupils, referring to these as the key measure of improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the senior leadership team. I also met the Chair of the Governing Body with the Vice-Chair and another governor, and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I visited all the classrooms, where I looked at pupils' work and asked pupils about their learning. I

evaluated a range of documents including teachers' planning for what pupils will learn, information about pupils' progress, the school's improvement plans, your records of checks on teaching, governing body minutes and local authority reports.

Context

A maternity leave has started since the inspection. A newly qualified teacher (NQT) is now teaching this class.

Main findings

After the inspection you acted swiftly to develop school policy in areas identified for improvement. You have provided new guidance for teachers setting out your clear expectations for the way they organise their classrooms, plan and teach lessons and mark pupils' work. These documents strongly reflect the Catholic ethos of the school in the way they make clear your expectation that everyone in the school community will give the best and achieve the best they can.

You have ensured that teachers set appropriate targets for each pupils' achievement this year in reading, writing and mathematics. This includes well-considered targets for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, the most able pupils, pupils who are learning English as an additional language, and those supported by the pupil premium (The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils receiving free school meals or looked after). You expect teachers to consider more closely the particular needs of these pupils when they plan lessons, but at this stage this remains variable.

Together with other senior leaders, you now regularly check teaching. You have provided relevant training, including coaching for individual members of staff. As a result, teachers are beginning to implement aspects of the new policies and I saw clear examples of improvements to lesson plans, displays and marking. However, this is not yet consistent between classes. Furthermore, the checks you make do not focus well enough on the areas identified for improvement in the inspection report and particularly the progress of under-achieving groups.

You have set out clear expectations for the way subject leaders work. You now expect them to check pupils' progress and the quality of pupils' work, and to organise training and support for staff. Importantly, you have recently reminded all teachers of the 'professional standards' required by the government, and helpfully required them to review their knowledge and skills to inform future professional development activities.

It was pleasing to see the recent improvement made to provision in Reception class. Staff are clearly giving greater thought to the range and purpose of activities

provided, with the new 'challenge cards' inviting children to try harder and achieve more.

The school's improvement plan includes a range of helpful actions, but does not relate closely enough to all the specific areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. While the plan includes general expectations for pupils' progress each year, it does not feature the specific targets set for under-achieving groups. Furthermore, how governors will check and measure the school's improvement is not set out clearly enough. The early positive review recorded for some actions has a limited value because it does not consider well enough whether improvement in pupils' progress has resulted.

Under the able leadership of the Chair, governors are committed to ensure the school becomes a good school as soon as possible. Governors lost no time after the inspection in securing expert advice and putting in place measures to streamline their work, and focus the way they support senior leaders and hold them to account. However, the role of governors in checking the school's improvement is not set out clearly enough in the improvement plan.

External support

The local authority responded swiftly to the inspection, helpfully supporting the school to accept and act upon the findings. Already, clear improvement is emerging in early years provision as a result of useful guidance from local authority consultants. Advisers have helpfully checked senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching. However, the local authority's support for leaders' improvement planning has been less effective.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and as below.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector