

25 March 2015

Miss Elaine Mathews
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC Primary School
Armstrong Road
Benwell
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE15 6JB

Dear Miss Mathews

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's RC Primary School, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Following my visit, accompanied by Claire Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 24 March 2015, 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.

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:

- review and update the school's self-evaluation to ensure it is more reflective of the school's current position and compares pupils' performance to national expectations
- ensure that school improvement plans have a more precise focus on the achievement of all groups of pupils so that governors can measure the progress made more accurately and hold leaders and staff to account more robustly
- raise expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that more pupils make better than expected progress in order to achieve their full potential
- ensure marking and feedback identify precisely what pupils need to do to improve so that they move on in their learning more quickly.

Evidence

During the visit, we held meetings with you, three other school leaders, a small group of pupils, four members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plans and scrutinised other documents, including the school's evaluation of its performance, a report on the external review of governance, minutes of governing body meetings, the governor's action plan and a report from the local authority. You accompanied us on a tour of the school and we looked at samples of pupils' work, to check on improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) has been appointed. One parent governor and one foundation governor have resigned from the governing body and two new foundation governors have been appointed.

Main findings

You, senior leaders and governors have taken prompt and positive action to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. You are holding staff to account for the progress pupils make, for example, through mid-term meetings to discuss pupils' progress. This is enabling staff to provide timely support if any pupils are falling behind. Leaders promptly reviewed the policy and procedures for marking and providing feedback to pupils. This has resulted in new systems which pupils clearly understand. Pupils know that when they arrive at school in the morning, their first task is to correct any errors from the previous day or improve their work. This is now embedding across the school. However, while marking clearly identifies what pupils have done well, the 'next steps' teachers provide for pupils are not always precise enough to move pupils on in their learning quickly. Occasionally, the work provided lacks challenge and limits pupils' progress because teachers do not move pupils on to more challenging work quickly enough if they have already fully understood the concept.

Pupils were keen to inform me that they thoroughly enjoy reading their 'class book' and the wider range of reading materials which are now available. They now write reviews of what they have read and say they enjoy reading more at school and at home. Pupils were also able to explain clearly the way in which they use new resources to assist them in tackling mathematical calculations and that they are now able to use and apply their skills to solve problems more effectively. This was evident in pupils' books.

Senior and subject leaders are developing their roles further by checking the quality of teaching and learning more carefully. They carry out observations of teaching, scrutinise pupils' work and teachers' planning and talk to pupils about what they are learning. Together with information discussed in meetings about pupils' progress, they have a clearer picture of the quality of teaching across the school. A system of coaching and mentoring has been introduced and specific support is being provided to help staff improve their skills. There are more opportunities for training, which includes teaching assistants, and this is helping to improve the quality of teaching.

Leaders and governors have produced a new action plan following the inspection. While this identifies the right priorities and milestones for improvement, it does not contain precise enough targets for all groups of pupils so that success can be measured more effectively. The school's self-evaluation has not been reviewed since the inspection and does not reflect the current position of the school. In addition, important information has been omitted in respect of pupils' achievement in all year groups and subjects. Leaders do not compare pupils' performance in relation to national expectations. There is no information about the quality of teaching or children's achievement in the early years.

Governance is improving. Governors have responded positively to the external review of governance and are now beginning to challenge school leaders. They are starting to visit the school to see for themselves how well pupils are learning. With the support of a National Leader of Governance, they are starting to develop their skills in analysing school performance data. Amendments to the school action plan, as stated above, will further support governors in this monitoring process.

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 is providing effective challenge and valuable input to help the school improve. The Education Development Partner has delivered whole school training and conducted a learning walk to help improve the quality of teaching, in addition to leading meetings to challenge the work of the school. A number of local authority and external consultants have provided a range of support, including whole staff training on aspects of teaching and learning, in mathematics and conducted assessments in physical education. They have worked with subject leaders and the impact can be seen in the improving quality of teaching and in developing leadership skills. Following an external review of governance by the local authority, a National Leader of Governance is now providing support and training for governors. This is helping them to begin to understand school performance data so they can more robustly challenge school leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector