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26 March 2015

Mrs Sue Horncastle  
Headteacher  
Our Lady of Good Help Catholic Primary School  
South Drive  
Wavertree  
Liverpool  
Merseyside  
L15 8JL

Dear Mrs Horncastle

**Requires improvement: second monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady of Good Help Catholic Primary School, Liverpool**

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection as the progress currently being made is too slow. The school should take immediate action to:

- review and simplify the current action plan to ensure that strategies are clear, manageable and focused and also include actions to improve governance and middle leadership
- as a matter of urgency, ensure that appropriate safeguarding training for governors is completed
- provide training for staff, including teaching assistants, to improve the quality of guided reading and phonics teaching and, if necessary, revise the timetable to ensure that these are delivered regularly and effectively to all appropriate classes

- ensure that middle leaders have an impact on developing and improving teaching and learning in their area of responsibility.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself and two assistant headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors as well as with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were held with groups of pupils from Years 3 and 6. A meeting was also held with the national leader in education from Great Crosby Catholic Primary School who has recently started to provide support for the school. The school's development plan, and other documentation, which you provided, was also evaluated. In addition, we jointly observed several teaching sessions. These observations focussed on the overall quality of the guided reading and phonics (the teaching of letters and sounds). In addition, I interviewed the music and history/geography subject leaders to discuss how they were managing and developing their subjects across the school.

## **Context**

There have been minimal staffing changes since my previous visit in December 2014. An assistant headteacher has returned to the school following maternity leave. The governing body was reconstituted in January and a new chair and two vice-chairs have been appointed.

## **Main findings**

Although the action plan has been reviewed, since my previous visit, it is still too complex and repetitive. In certain areas it does not fully address impact. For example, there is a list of computer and software purchases but no indication how these are to be used to enhance learning or what specific training might be required to upskill teachers to use these new resources effectively. Also, there are no specific strategies to develop middle leadership or governance, which were specific recommendations made when the school was inspected in July.

Current data do not suggest that much improvement will be evident by the end of this academic year. There remain too many inconsistencies across the school. Concerns remain about the progress of pupils, especially in Key Stage 1. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers varies from class to class. In some classes the gap has closed in others it remains relatively wide. The most able are not being given sufficient challenge in most lessons and this also holds back their progress.

Teaching requires further improvement. I completed two learning walks with you focussing on the teaching of guided reading and phonics. There are issues with the

teaching of both these aspects which need to be improved. In many of these sessions the pace of learning is too slow. An attempt has been made to re-structure the guided reading and make it more focussed and better organised. However, the training provided has been insufficient for teachers to deliver this with rigour or consistency. Pupils are not familiar with the routines and too much time is wasted as a result. Laptops and tablets were being used regularly in group work as if they were a panacea for supporting reading. In reality this had little impact on improving the learning. Technology was often a distraction rather than an aid to learning. Pupils were accessing books which were not appropriate for their reading ages and some were struggling with some of the vocabulary. Other activities to improve spelling merely occupied the pupils with the technology and did little to develop their vocabulary or spelling. Activities for the groups which were working independently of the teacher were often inappropriate with pupils colouring in, or drawing, pictures linked to the story they had been reading. All classrooms now have reading corners but again those pupils who were designated to read in these areas were frequently off task, changing books every few minutes or merely flicking through the pages. There was little evidence of concentrated and sustained reading. Teacher led activities were slightly more productive. However, although pupils were reading with the teacher, mispronunciation was not always being corrected and pupils' abilities to deconstruct and understand the text was not always being helped by the questioning.

The teaching of phonics is being held back by the very large groups pupils are taught in - over thirty pupils in some cases. This makes effective teaching unmanageable and the dynamics of the groups mean that pupils get little individual attention or support. Some pupils can go through the whole session without having made any contribution. Phonics is taught in the afternoons when there is no teaching assistant support which could have reduced the size of the groups and made these more manageable and the teaching more effective.

In discussion with the subject leaders with responsibility for history/geography and music, which you had identified as being the most pro-active in the school, it was clear that they were beginning to understand their roles and were developing their own expertise. They had attended appropriate subject specific training and update meetings provided by the local authority. As a result, they had been able to provide an outline of what they expected to be taught in each year group in line with the new national curriculum requirements. However, although there was now greater clarification of what should be taught and when, there was little evidence of impact or development in these subjects. As a result, although teachers are covering the topics, they were not going into sufficient depth or with sufficient rigour for pupils to develop real understanding and mastery in the subject. Too many activities still occupy pupils rather than engage them in meaningful learning. In music, good links have been established with the Resonate music education hub at Notre Dame College. The subject leader has some positive ideas about how she intends to develop music across the school, but currently there is a lack of consistency across classes and not all teachers are allocating sufficient time to teach it effectively. Apart

from English and mathematics, there is too much variation in the time allocated to the teaching of various subjects across the school, compounding the inconsistencies and lack of progression in pupils' learning.

In discussions with pupils it was very clear that they were generally happy being at school and most held positive views. The school cares and looks after its pupils very well. Pupils were aware that there was a greater focus on reading and they identified that the guided reading lessons were organised differently than previously. The school had visited Corinthians Primary School and brought back several ideas and teachers were attempting to implement these. Teachers are now checking on home reading regularly and books are being changed much more frequently. In discussion with pupils, the most able in particular, found too many of their lessons to be relatively easy and lacking challenge. Pupils also thought that behaviour around the school was improving, although they considered that it wasn't yet good enough. They also felt that lessons were still being disrupted by a small handful of pupils. During the learning walks we noticed too many occasions when pupils were still shouting out during teacher questioning and there was often too much fidgeting with limited attention being paid to what adults were saying. Pupils considered that the detention system was effective in reducing the amount of poor behaviour in lessons and that teachers were handling incidents of poor behaviour much more effectively. However, there is still more that could be improved.

Governance has been reconstituted. There is now a clear desire to be much more active and visible around the school. Governors are aware that the school requires clear direction if it is to become a good school. They are now beginning to ask more challenging questions of school leaders either directly or through the Challenge Board meetings which are held regularly to monitor the progress the school is making. Following the reconstitution of the governing body in January, statutory safeguarding training has not yet been completed.

If this school is to improve there needs to be greater clarity of what is to be achieved over the next two terms and a greater impetus and desire to make sure this happens.

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 now monitoring the school much more closely than previously. The school has been the beneficiary of consultant support, notably most recently for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Challenge Board meetings, held every half term, are providing a useful platform, to challenge school leaders and hold them to account. The school has adopted some of the curriculum planning materials produced by the local authority, notably in English. Support has been brokered from

a national leader in education and links are being established with her school, Great Crosby Catholic Primary school. This is in its infancy and has not yet had time to impact. The school has benefitted from links with Corinthians Primary School and is hoping to establish a working relationship with Wharton Church of England Primary School in Cheshire to develop the curriculum and middle leadership in particular.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Arch-diocese of Liverpool and the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

**Her Majesty's Inspector**