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Mrs Janet Butterworth
Executive Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Preston
Rigby Street
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 5XL

Dear Mrs Butterworth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Preston, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 17 April 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- strengthen the school development plan so that responsibility for each of the identified actions is distributed more widely among senior and middle leaders. This will help to share accountability for the impact of the actions being taken to improve the school among your colleagues rather than shouldering that burden yourself
- where possible ensure that success criteria, in the plan, are measurable so that it is clear what governors' expectations are for students' outcomes. Further, include suitable milestones in the plan so that the progress that senior leaders are making against each of the improvement priorities can be measured
- continue to improve the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils so that the impact it has on pupils' progress is maximised

- develop and implement a policy for improving pupils' spelling and handwriting in order to further drive improvements in the quality of their written work.

Evidence

During the visit, I had a meeting with you, the consultant headteacher and the recently appointed associate headteacher. I held separate meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority, the subject leader with responsibility for literacy and the acting deputy headteacher who has oversight of Key Stage 1.

You accompanied me on a tour of the school, where we visited classrooms in which pupils were engaged on a number of activities related to developing their literacy. I had lunch in the school dining hall which afforded me the opportunity to speak with pupils about their experience of school. I also held informal conversations with staff and spoke to parents who were visiting the school.

I scrutinised the work in a sample of pupils' books and examined a number of documents. These included the revised school development plan and the school's current data on pupils' attainment and progress.

Context

The school has experienced some turbulence at senior leadership level. The headteacher has been absent since 2 February 2015. In order to ensure continuity of senior leadership and provide stability, you and two colleagues have been engaged, by governors, to work with colleagues to lead and manage the school in his absence. The school's business manager, who was in post at the time of my last visit to the school, has since left and a new appointment to the position has been made.

Main findings

You have acted quickly on the inspection findings. You have galvanised your colleagues into action by putting in place a succinct, but nevertheless effective, development plan that identifies the actions to be taken by staff to improve the school. Some key details are missing from the plan; for example, lines of accountability are not always sufficiently clear and some of the success criteria are not sharp enough. You accept that this may present some difficulties for governors when they come to measure the progress that you and your colleagues are making against each of the development priorities.

Senior leaders and the governors, quite rightly, have identified that the most pressing priority is improving pupils' literacy across the school, particularly pupils' writing and their knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters and groups of letters make). At the start of the summer term, senior leaders engaged the services of local

authority consultants to lead staff training in these two key aspects of reading and writing. The intention being to develop staff's expertise, boost their confidence and as a consequence improve the quality of teaching in these two areas. Further, governors have appointed a member of staff to take responsibility for coordinating the teaching of phonics and you have rearranged pupil groupings in Key Stage 1, with the expressed aim of maximising the impact of phonics teaching on pupils' achievement. Although it is early days, the school reports that pupils' progress in literacy is beginning to accelerate. However, you are realistic in your view that much remains to be done to bring performance outcomes in reading and writing up to, at least, current national averages.

Since your appointment, you have actively sought to forge partnerships with successful schools and the local literacy coordinators' group; to share good practice about what works best in the classroom. However, these relationships are in their infancy and, as yet, it is too early to assess their impact on the quality of teaching at St Joseph's.

Soon after joining the staff of the school you identified that teachers' assessment of the quality of pupils' work in reading and writing was unreliable. Consequently, teachers found it difficult to plan appropriate activities for their pupils to do. Sometimes the tasks were too difficult and sometimes too hard and as a result pupils' progress was slow. You are taking steps to address this. For example teachers work together to jointly plan lessons to develop pupils' writing skills and they are also involved in assessing the quality of each other's assessments. As a result, senior leaders and governors report that the quality of the teaching of writing is beginning to improve and they have much greater confidence in the data they are receiving about pupils' progress. The school's current data for Year 6 indicates that pupils' progress in writing has caught up with their progress in reading and mathematics so that it is broadly in line with 2014 national averages. However, you are acutely aware that inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and as a result attainment in writing, at Key Stage 2, continues to lag behind the other two areas of the curriculum.

It is evident from the sample of books that I scrutinised during my visit that teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in detail. However, there are examples of pupils not acting on their teachers' advice to improve their work. Further, I could find no consistent approach to the marking of pupils' spelling and in some books pupils' presentation declined as the year progressed. Consequently, the impact of marking on pupils' progress is not being maximised.

In those lessons we visited during our tour of the school, pupils behaved well. They engaged with the tasks that they had been given to do and relationships with each other and their teachers were cordial and friendly. During the midday break I observed pupils sitting and eating their lunch together in a well-managed and orderly environment. Routines for using the dining hall are well understood by the pupils and as a result their dining experience is relaxed and pleasant.

The review of governance, recommended by inspectors at the previous inspection, has been completed and governors are beginning to act on the findings. They have plans in place to review the committee structure and undertake training in analysing pupil performance data and school development planning. Governors believe these actions will enable them to obtain information about the operation of the school, independently of the senior leadership team, and so hold senior leaders more robustly to account for the impact of their work to improve the school.

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

External support

In what has been an unsettled period in the school's recent history the local authority have provided effective support to the school. They acted quickly to stabilise the senior leadership team in the headteachers' absence, brokering the services of you and two other senior colleagues to lead and manage the school. The local authority's monitoring and intervention team are working effectively with school staff to bring about improvements in the teaching of literacy. A local authority consultant carried out the recent review of governance. This review is providing a steer to governors on the future direction of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector