

18 June 2015

Mrs Sarah-Jane Carroll  
Acting Headteacher  
St Laurence's Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Carroll

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Laurence's Catholic Primary School, Knowsley**

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 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 February 2015. 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:

- agree common standards for handwriting to improve presentation of written work
- ensure teacher-produced materials model correct punctuation
- evaluate pupils' progress in science as a basis to revise the science curriculum plan
- in the post-inspection action plan, put in place more measurable milestones and distinguish between monitoring and evaluation.

### **Evidence**

During the visit I met you and the headteacher designate, members of the governing body, a group of middle leaders for English and mathematics, and representatives of the diocese and local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's post-inspection action plan and data linked with it. After a tour of the school with you, I heard a sample of pupils reading. I considered a sample of pupils' work jointly with you and the headteacher designate. We looked at work over time in mathematics, English, science, geography and history.

## Context

The headteacher at the time of the inspection has retired. You are leading the school as acting headteacher. A headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2015. She joined the day's visit.

## Main findings

The school looks bright and attractive. There are many displays made by pupils, that others can learn from, such as an illustrated history time-line and displays to discourage bullying. In and outside school, there are colourful art murals produced by pupils to a high standard.

The acting headteacher has worked with great energy on issues raised by the inspection, while continuing many of her duties as deputy. She has ensured that teachers work as a team. Those I talked with found this refreshing and energising. Teachers have better information about how well pupils, groups and classes are doing. In mathematics, the lead teacher has been able to evaluate progress across the school. As a result, she has put in place new resources and teaching technique, such as on problem-solving. More challenging work, depth and faster progress could be seen in the sample of mathematics books.

We heard some pupils reading in Key Stages 1 and 2. They read with confidence and understanding, though not always with expression. When asked to read unfamiliar texts, such as posters on the wall, they had effective ways to tackle new words ('paragraph', 'astonishingly') and could explain how to break a word down and use phonic cues.

In the sample of written work, we could see that pupils are being given more demanding tasks and writing at more length (such as in a geography project on coastal erosion). In English, there was more evidence of pupils planning longer writing. Spelling was generally better than punctuation. Handwriting and presentation held pupils back, in too many pieces of work. Even amongst older children, letters and words were of uneven size, text wandered away from margins. Capital letters were used mid-word but not at the start of sentences.

A worksheet used in science – filling in blank words on plant reproduction – encouraged children to use capital letters incorrectly. Science books did not show the same progress as in other subjects. Work was set at too low a level or in inappropriate forms. For example, asking older children to write a poem on 'forces' was confusing for them.

The post-inspection action plan has strengths and weaknesses. The opening pages correctly identify areas most in need of improvement. Current performance is analysed with targets for 2016. However, the rest of the plan does not link clearly with the opening. Not enough measurable information is included in the body of the plan. Some milestones refer to general 'improvement' or 'agreement'. More precise measures are needed within the body of the plan so that the success of different steps can be tracked. It is not clear what the targets are for 2015. Improving assessment should feature more clearly.

In the main body of the plan, there are thoughtful, sensible steps to bring about improvement. For example, 'Pupil Voice' meetings include questions about how well teachers explain to pupils, with feedback subsequently provided for teachers to act upon, supported by videos teachers have made in mathematics as a further training aid. In the plan, exact dates are given for activities. Clear lines of responsibility can be seen, with named people for specific actions, making it easier to hold staff to account. However, there is not enough distinction between monitoring (checking actions are carried out) and evaluation (judging impact).

Governors have come to welcome the inspection report and are enthusiastic about the better information they now get. They recognise the importance of comparing the progress of children at St Laurence's with that of others nationally, and making a more forensic analysis of how well different groups achieve. They have sought training and commissioned reviews of governance and pupil premium as required by the inspection report, though neither is as yet complete.

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 diocese has provided valuable support for governors in appointing a new headteacher from a local outstanding school. A diocesan officer is about to work with governors in the process of re-constitution. It was intended to provide management support to the deputy headteacher / acting headteacher but it was not possible to identify a suitable person.

The local authority has supported the school to interpret and use the inspection report, and in the format of the action plan. A key challenge from the local authority has been the recent moderation visit of assessment at Key Stage 1. This has given further impetus for the acting headteacher and headteacher designate to review and update assessment practices thoroughly, which is much needed.

- The local authority should update formats for action planning suggested to schools requiring improvement, to reflect assessment without levels, to distinguish monitoring from evaluation, and for milestones that can be measured.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

**Her Majesty's Inspector**