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Damien Thorpe  
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Dear Mr Thorpe

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2016, 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 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that professional development and the monitoring of performance result in consistently good teaching
- identify why boys are not achieving well enough, especially in mathematics, and take effective action to accelerate their progress
- ensure that the arrangements for governance and subject leadership across the federation result in a more effective curriculum, stronger teaching, better learning, more rigorous assessment, and higher outcomes at key stages 1 and 2.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, the head of school, school and federation subject leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body

and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I looked at the September results of the Ofsted online survey of parents and met with parents as they arrived at school. I considered the school improvement plan and other documents provided by the school. The head of school and I made brief visits to lessons and I examined the work in pupils' books.

## **Context**

In April 2016, you took up post as the new executive headteacher of the three schools in the federation. A new head of school joined the school in September 2016. In July 2016, a new chair of the governing body started. In April 2016, a new teacher and a newly qualified teacher arrived. In September, another teacher and another newly qualified teacher started. Only one member of the current teaching staff was at the school at the previous inspection.

This school is in a federation with two other Catholic primary schools. Since September 2016, the federation has appointed subject leaders to work across all three schools. Each school in the federation has a newly appointed link governor.

## **Main findings**

The school is going through a period of rapid change. You have brought about major changes in staffing and are beginning to improve the way the school and the federation work. You recognise the weakness in outcomes and have clear strategies for bringing about improvement.

Some parents were unhappy about the decline they had witnessed at the school, as shown in responses to the Ofsted online survey in September. All the parents I spoke to were pleased with the recent changes you have made and they welcome the new head of school. They are optimistic that, together, you will bring about further improvements.

Parents said that the school is more welcoming and that communication has improved. Your new website provides better information about what is happening in the school and in individual classes. You communicate more frequently and effectively using text messages and letters. They are pleased that homework is better organised and that there are more after-school clubs. Pupils are positive about the changes. They welcome the clearer rewards and sanctions and say that behaviour has improved.

The introduction of new staff is enabling a fresh start. The newly qualified staff are early in their career and have made an effective start. They are receiving appropriate support from their mentors and subject leaders from the local authority and the federation.

Changes to the curriculum are strengthening the quality of teaching. Teachers are

taking more responsibility for the learning of all pupils rather than relying too heavily on extra support from teaching assistants.

Progress in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was weak in 2015. In 2016, pupils' progress improved to average because teaching in Year 6 used a different scheme of work that focused more accurately on the demands of the new national curriculum. Assessment was more effective in identifying and closing gaps in learning.

The enthusiastic new leader of mathematics has begun to work with subject leaders in other schools within the federation and beyond. Plans are in place for training and development in the new mastery curriculum in mathematics.

In 2016, key stage 2 outcomes improved in mathematics. However, progress and attainment in reading and writing declined and were well below average. This was due to a legacy of weak teaching. Teaching did not meet the greater demands of the new reading test. Pupils lacked opportunities to develop skills in extended writing.

You identified that the curriculum provided too little structure and inspiration for reading and writing. You have introduced a new approach to topic work that provides more purpose and stimulation for writing. More guidance in lessons and classroom displays enables pupils to see examples of what to include in their writing. On occasion, teaching lacks a precise enough focus and pupils are unclear how to succeed in their writing. Assessment of the current Year 6 indicates that more pupils are on track to meet the expected standard in reading in 2017. However, they remain behind in mathematics and writing.

Key stage 1 assessments in 2016 showed that Year 2 pupils made inadequate progress from the end of the early years and that attainment was well below average. This was due to weak teaching. Changes of staff promise improved teaching.

Boys are achieving less well than girls are, especially in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils, some of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making less progress than others are.

Outcomes in the phonics check in Year 1 improved in 2016 and were above average. However, you recognise that staff changes and the inexperience of newly qualified teachers mean that more work is required to secure current pupils' progress in phonics. The head of school plans to reorganise teaching groups, provide training and check the effectiveness of teaching, supported by the federation leader for phonics and early years.

In 2016, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years was not as high as in recent years and was average.

Leaders have set higher targets for what pupils should achieve at the end of each year, including for the most able, and these are set as performance management targets for teachers. Systems of assessment are developing, supported by a new leader for assessment in the federation. At present, the analysis of data does not provide enough information about the progress of different groups, including the most able, but this will be available shortly.

The new chair of the governing body is a national leader of governance. He brings considerable experience and is determined to improve the impact of the governing body rapidly. The restructured agenda for meetings focuses more sharply on actions to tackle the weaknesses in performance. New link governors are responsible for acquiring a detailed and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in each school. The new chair is supporting and challenging governors to be more effective in holding leaders to account. Until recently, governors have presided over school decline. It is too early to see the impact of the new procedures.

### **External support**

Following a local authority review in September 2016, the local authority provided funding and brokered support from the Tykes Teaching School Alliance to improve the quality of teaching, provision in the early years and the teaching of reading. A consultant from the local authority also supports the development of the early years. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

The school works with external consultants to support teachers in planning and assessing the new curriculum. These developments are at an early stage.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hallam, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**