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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Bozena Laraway, Executive Headteacher
Mrs Patricia Bryson, Head of School
St John Fisher Catholic Primary School
Burney Drive
Loughton
Essex
IG10 2DY

Dear Mrs Laraway and Mrs Bryson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2017 with Susan Aykin, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the interim executive board are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- include in its action plan clear measures for success, specific timescales and detailed information about who will monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions taken
- carry out the external review of the use of the pupil premium funding, as stipulated in the inspection report
- record and robustly track incidents of pupils' inappropriate behaviour
- actively seek, formally record, evaluate and act upon parents' views.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you both, the five middle leaders, the parish priest, two members of the interim executive board and the local authority adviser working with the school to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils and informally with others when observing the school's work.

Together with yourselves, inspectors observed lessons and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. Inspectors scrutinised the interim executive board's minutes of meetings and records of school visits, reports by the local authority adviser, assessment information and records of pupils' behaviour. The school's action plan was evaluated.

I gave formal feedback on the inspection findings to you both, two members of the interim executive board and the adviser from the local authority.

Context

As at the time of the September 2016 inspection, the school is led by an executive headteacher, who is also the headteacher at St Helen's Junior Catholic School in Brentwood. Between September and December 2016, the executive headteacher led St John Fisher for two days each week. The deputy headteacher at St Helen's led St John Fisher for the other three days each week as the head of school. Since January 2017, she leads the school full-time in this role. This arrangement will continue until the end of the summer term 2017.

An interim executive board, comprising three members, continues to provide governance for the school. The executive headteacher and the school's linked local authority adviser are non-voting members of the board.

Main findings

Senior leaders, middle leaders and the interim executive board were disappointed with the September 2016 inspection report. They believe that the report did not give enough attention to the work that was done to improve the school's performance since the 2014 inspection. Nonetheless, the accuracy of the inspection findings is not disputed and, although staff morale was low after the inspection, staff have focused successfully on the things that need to improve. Staff morale has improved. This monitoring inspection confirms the view of senior leaders and the interim executive board that there is still much work to do to address the inspection findings fully. The school's view is that it will take about another 18 months to make sure that pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching are good.

The action plan focuses appropriately on the weaknesses identified during the September 2016 inspection. Suitable actions are identified, but success measures, timescales and responsibilities are not clear enough to drive improvements robustly

in the long term. Middle leaders have action plans for their areas of responsibility that successfully guide their work, but the absence of a clear strategic overview means there is not a sufficient framework in place to pull together the work of the school or to track the effectiveness of the actions taken. The interim executive board was slow to establish an action plan and have not challenged its quality.

Improvements that had started to make a difference to pupils at the September 2016 inspection have continued. Middle leaders are clear about what needs to be done and how to improve teaching and the curriculum. Accurate, regular, formal checks on what pupils can do show that, since September 2016, more pupils than before are on track to reach at least expected progress.

Pupils in key stage 1 are not making progress as rapidly as other pupils because the high expectations of children when they were in the Reception Year have not been maintained sufficiently into Years 1 and 2. The early years leader now has additional responsibilities to oversee the progress of pupils in key stage 1. The leader knows what needs to be done to make sure that expectations are high enough, but it is too early to see the difference in pupils' achievements.

The assessment leader has a strong understanding of how to target, record, track and evaluate pupils' attainment. Pupils' work is checked with staff in other schools, which confirms that the assessments are accurate.

The head of school has worked successfully with teachers to plan teaching that includes different starting points for activities depending on the ability of pupils. Observing teaching and looking at pupils' work over the autumn term 2016 has helped improve teaching and staff are well supported by the head of school.

The curriculum has been reviewed to make sure that pupils are taught all of the things they need to know and that the right resources are available. The revised approach to teaching writing now helps pupils write at length and about things that interest them. Work on display shows that most pupils write confidently and are well organised in how they present written tasks. In some classes, pupils do not practise reading and spelling skills systematically enough, which slows progress and wastes learning time.

Classrooms are bright, tidy and well resourced. Displays in class consist mostly of lists of vocabulary or mathematical concepts. There is very little on display to help pupils check or extend their work, or to celebrate and explain what they have learned. It is not clear how usefully the environment supports pupils' learning.

Pupils are typically well behaved in class. At breaktimes there are some incidents of inappropriate behaviour, including pushing, hitting and unacceptable language. The incidents are not recorded in enough detail to give a full picture of what happened or how problems were followed up.

The September 2016 report identified the need to improve communications with parents, which was also an area for improvement at the 2014 inspection. Currently, leaders do not have sufficiently robust information to know what parents think, or to take concerted action on any concerns raised. Parents' views have not been sought formally since the inspection and leaders rely on the absence of complaints and informal contacts with parents.

Outdated policies and procedures on the website at the time of the 2016 inspection have been replaced with current ones. Parents now have up-to-date information.

External support

The local authority identifies the school as requiring a high level of support and an adviser reviews the school's work frequently. The adviser provides useful reports to senior leaders on the quality of the school's work and attends the meetings of the interim executive board, giving appropriate support and challenge. The local authority support will continue for the foreseeable future.

The external review of the pupil premium funding, as recommended at the September 2016 inspection, has not taken place. A consultant has been identified for the review but a date has not been set. The review needs to happen as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector