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Mrs Catherine Monaghan
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Preston
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Dear Mrs Monaghan

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

Following my visit to your school on 19 April 2018, 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 January 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in January 2017, 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- plans to improve the school have specific targets that set high aspirations for pupils' outcomes
- progress and attainment information is used with greater precision to improve teaching so that pupils' progress is more rapid, particularly for the most able pupils
- leaders of subjects, other than English and mathematics, continue to develop assessment systems to inform teachers' planning for different groups of pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I observed teaching and learning in seven classes with the headteacher. I heard six pupils from Year 1 read and heard other pupils read their own work during classroom activities. I met with leaders for English, mathematics, phonics, science and art. I conducted a work scrutiny of a sample of writing and mathematics books. I inspected the school's single central register of employment checks. I reviewed and discussed performance information for pupils presently in the school. I also reviewed information regarding leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning, as well as the checks on school effectiveness conducted by the local authority.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have brought stability to the school. You have changed the culture so that staff are all working together as a team. Staff are committed and enthusiastic. The improved morale of the staff is reflected in the environment. Displays are bright and celebrate pupils' work. Pupils' behaviour has improved and they have a good attitude towards learning. Pupils are proud to be part of the school. They are engaged in their learning because of the interesting and enjoyable tasks that teachers provide. Pupils display a clear enjoyment of their work. Governors and leaders have promoted a clear Christian vision for the school.

You have addressed the disruption to pupils' education caused by the turnover of staff. You have made strong appointments to strengthen your team of teaching staff. As a result, the staff team is now more stable, which has created greater consistency for pupils. You have also made the best use of local authority support to provide training to develop the skills of teachers and other adults. The result is that pupils are now making more consistent and steady progress in their learning. Leaders are aware that pupils now need to make accelerated progress to compensate for the legacy of weaker teaching and reduce the difference between the attainment of pupils in the school and the standards achieved by pupils nationally.

The phonics leader has been highly effective and has had a direct impact on improving the standards achieved by pupils. Clear targets have been set for pupils' attainment in phonics so that staff are clear about the standard pupils are working towards. Leaders have overseen the implementation of a new scheme to teach phonics consistently throughout the early years and key stage 1. Energetic and targeted teaching of phonics ensures that pupils in Year 1 read fluently and with expression. The most able pupils apply their phonics skills with ease. The information about pupils' performance shows that pupils' skills in phonics are

improving. Pupils say that they have a wide variety of books to read and they read frequently in school. The school encourages pupils to read at home through a reward system. This ensures that pupils are enthusiastic about reading and this encourages parents and carers to engage more in their child's education.

As a result of the training provided by the local authority, teachers match work well to pupils' needs. Teachers value the training that they have received. In mathematics, the effect can be seen in the greater attention given to improving pupils' problem-solving activities. Pupils in Year 6 use their mathematical reasoning skills to solve a range of challenging problems. However, leaders are aware that there is a need for inject further challenge into pupils' mathematics work, particularly for the most able pupils. The school's information on pupils' performance indicates that, currently, not enough pupils are progressing towards meeting the expected standards for their age at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. Pupils' work does not presently show the accelerated progress needed in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

The school has employed a consultant to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress. The work of these pupils shows that they are now making steady gains in their writing and mathematics work.

You and senior leaders have improved the training for subject leaders who have responsibility for subjects beyond English and mathematics. As a result, they are now monitoring standards in their areas more effectively. They have also overseen the development of the curriculum in their areas, with a clear focus on developing pupils' subject-specific skills. Pupils' work demonstrates a good understanding of the topics covered. Leaders use recognised schemes to audit their subjects to improve them further. However, assessment systems to inform teachers' planning for different abilities of pupils in topics such as science and art are in their infancy. As a result, the work in pupils' books is similar for both the most able and the middle-ability pupils. Teachers are not planning effectively for the most able pupils' different starting points in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Pupils' writing across the curriculum has become an area of strength. Pupils' written work in their topic and religious education books is of a similar standard to that seen in their writing books. The work provided for pupils is engaging and lively. For example, pupils in Year 6 clearly relished completing a piece of work which offers an alternative view of Christmas from the perspective of a donkey.

You have clearly grasped the opportunities to improve pupils' attendance. You have introduced rewards for pupils that have fired their enthusiasm and increased their determination to attend school. The family support worker engages parents in a more targeted way. As a result, attendance has improved to 96.2%, which is in line with historical national averages. Governors are actively involved in securing better attendance and they have a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses in

this area.

The school's plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement that were identified at the last inspection detail suitable actions but lack specific and measurable targets. The improvements in phonics have been rapid because leaders' plans outline clear measures of success that staff are working towards. You have already identified the need to define clearer targets and higher aspirations to bring about more rapid improvements in reading, writing and mathematics.

External support

The school has benefited from the training that has been provided by the local authority, particularly in relation to the teaching of English, mathematics and science. The checks that the local authority have conducted on the school have provided accurate and detailed feedback on how to improve. Leaders and governors have welcomed this support and are keen to capitalise on the advice they are given.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector