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Mrs Jaqueline Hampson
Executive Headteacher
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hampson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Workington

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 monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in November 2016 in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- raise expectations of standards further so that pupils' learning improves rapidly and all make the gains of which they are capable
- fill the vacancies on the governing body in order to broaden the skills with which governors challenge senior leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, English, mathematics and key stage 1 leaders, and the office manager who is responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. We discussed the actions the school has taken since the last inspection. I also met with three members of the governing body and

a representative of the local authority. You and I visited classrooms to observe pupils at work. I met with a group of 10 pupils to gain their views of the school and spoke with others informally. I observed pupils' behaviour around school and looked at some of the work in their books. I evaluated your improvement plan and considered other evidence, including documentation on the monitoring of teaching and learning, minutes of the governing body meetings and reviews undertaken by the local authority and a national leader of governance.

Context

At the time of the last inspection, you and the deputy headteacher had recently joined the school. In addition to your role as executive headteacher at St Gregory's, you are also headteacher of another school. The chair of the governing body had recently taken up his post. Since the inspection in November 2016, you have formed a new leadership team. You provide opportunities for staff to work with colleagues from other schools, and the local authority has decreased its level of support. There has been significant turbulence in staffing which particularly, but not exclusively, affected those pupils who were in Year 6 during the last academic year. Staffing is now much more stable across the school. As a result, the school is more settled.

Main findings

Following the findings of the inspection in November 2016, you have galvanised the staff with your determination to make the changes necessary to get the school back on track. As a result, you and the deputy headteacher have now established a firm foundation on which to continue school improvement and accelerate pupils' learning.

You, the deputy headteacher and governors have a detailed and thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. You have used this information well to plan appropriate, well-defined actions to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Your development plan is succinct, with appropriate timescales and indications of what success will look like. This demonstrates that you clearly know what needs to happen to move the school forward. The implementation of your plans has been effective in bringing about improvements to the school, most notably in establishing high expectations of staff and pupils across the whole school. As a result, pupils are receiving a much more consistent experience and better standard of education.

Following the previous inspection, you have shown your commitment to developing the new leadership team. You have made leaders more accountable for their areas of responsibility across the school. Leaders rise to this challenge with enthusiasm and confidence, and are having a valuable influence on the improvements that are increasingly evident throughout the school.

You and the deputy headteacher have successfully set up a system for carrying out thorough checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have kept to your timetable and, consequently, leaders are often in classrooms observing

lessons, looking at the quality of pupils' work, talking with teachers about pupils' progress and asking pupils about their learning. You were asked to ensure that teachers inform pupils on how they can improve their work. This is now clearly the case, with a whole-school approach to assessing progress and attainment for individual pupils and groups of pupils during the course of the academic year. Teachers encourage pupils to check their own work and pupils enjoy rising to this challenge.

At the previous inspection, you were also asked to increase the opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes, not just in English but also across other subjects. There is now a raft of opportunities built into the curriculum for pupils to write in different styles and for a range of audiences.

With a more stable staff, you have been able to insist on a greater consistency in their approach to teaching. For example, you have embedded an expectation that there is a whole-school approach to teaching reading, writing and mathematics, and to developing pupils' skills to enable them to be resilient learners. All classrooms are resourced to an equally high standard. Adults have very positive, friendly and supportive relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils have a similar quality of experience and lesson content as they move through the different key stages in the school. The leadership team checks that teachers plan for the range of abilities in their class and, as a result, the progress that current pupils are making is better than at the time of the last inspection.

Inspectors also asked that the governors develop their skills so they can be robust in challenging senior leaders. You instigated support from a national leader of governance, who has carried out a review of governance, including a skills audit. It is clear from meeting three of the governors and from reviewing minutes of the governing body meetings that governors have more confidence in assessing many aspects of the school's work. For example, governors were astute in recently requesting more information on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, so they could be sure that these pupils are making appropriate progress from their individual starting points. However, because you do not have a full complement of governors, this somewhat limits their range of expertise.

Progress across all current year groups, and including disadvantaged pupils, demonstrates the impact of better-quality teaching, learning and assessment. Key stage 1 pupils have had the benefit of good provision in the early years and this is illustrated in their progress. Current Year 6 pupils are showing significant improvements in their progress. They have had the benefit of the changes you implemented two years ago. Now the school is more settled and consistent foundations have been laid, you are aware that you need to raise expectations of standards further, so pupils learn more rapidly and all make the gains of which they are capable.

You and the leadership team provide a stimulating curriculum, which draws pupils in and develops their love of learning. You enrich pupils' experiences with a wide range of trips beyond the local environment, and visitors to the school also broaden pupils' horizons.

External support

You have provided support from your other school, which was graded outstanding by Ofsted. This has proved beneficial in providing the staff with opportunities to see best practice beyond St Gregory's. You have invested time and money to enable staff to be coached both within and beyond the school. This is having a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. The staff told me they have found the advice and the opportunity to work with staff of other schools beneficial.

Since the previous inspection, representatives of the local authority have carried out a review of the school's effectiveness. The judgements made as a result of this review match closely your own assessment of how well the school is doing compared to other schools nationally.

During the current academic year, you instigated an external review of the governing body from a national leader of governance. This, together with further training for governors, has led to a restructuring of governors' responsibilities. In addition, governors are now more skilled in holding senior leaders to account for their actions. They demonstrate a genuine commitment to improving all aspects of school life. You ensure that governors have timely and accurate information so they can carry out their roles in both supporting and challenging you and other leaders. However, there remain vacancies on the governing body, leading to a significant workload for current governors.

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 Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector