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3 October 2018

Mrs J Richmond  
Headteacher  
St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Richmond

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 14 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

#### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, two members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese. The lead inspector and the headteacher visited every classroom on a learning walk, looked at pupils' books and discussed the end of key stage 2 provisional test results. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

#### **Context**

Following the previous headteacher's retirement at the end of the summer term, you were appointed in September 2018. An experienced chair of governors was also appointed in September 2018. The teaching staff has remained stable. One new

teaching assistant has been appointed to support pupils who have additional needs. The governing body and the diocese are starting to explore academy conversion, but there are no firm plans at this stage.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

During your first few weeks in post, you have brought about a sense of purpose and energy to the school. Other senior leaders are also making a positive contribution to the new direction. Staff are responding well to changes and are keen to improve their classroom practice. In recent months, the pace of improvement has picked up in the school.

The diocese and the local authority have provided strong leadership support, which has guided the school through a period of transition. They worked in partnership on recruitment. The local authority commissioned a review of governance. This provided a stimulus to bring about improvements to the governing body, including appointing an experienced chair of governors.

The local authority's statement of action was used by leaders to prioritise actions in the spring and summer terms. However, leaders did not develop a separate school improvement plan. Initially, this slowed down the pace of improvement. You are aware of this and acknowledge that it is a priority to put in place a separate school improvement plan as soon as possible. Sensibly, you did not want to rush this process in your first few weeks in post. Your initial monitoring has enabled you to have a good understanding of the key priorities for the school.

In the summer term, the deputy headteacher was proactive in her response to tackling the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. A new cycle for checking the quality of teaching was introduced and staff were involved in meetings to discuss the progress that their pupils were making. You and your leadership team have further developed this monitoring during this autumn term. Feedback given to staff is precise and is helping to develop the quality of teaching.

You have implemented a new system for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. While this is in the early stages of use, it is already improving staff's understanding of the national curriculum expectations. However, this work has not had time to be fully embedded, so assessments are not yet as accurate as they need to be.

A pupil premium review was carried out in the summer term. This review has enabled leaders to have a clear vision of how the premium could be better targeted and measured for impact. This has not yet been translated into the pupil premium plan for this academic year. Furthermore, the spending of the premium for last academic year is yet to be reviewed for impact. Neither of these two documents have been published on the school's website.

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection because staff are working

productively together to refine their practice. They have responded well to training and the expectations that you shared at the start of the year. Classroom environments are bright and purposeful. Teachers requiring more intensive support have taken on board advice and have made marked improvements to their teaching.

In mathematics, there are indications of increased challenge and more regular opportunities for pupils to apply their understanding through reasoning. In one lesson, pupils used concrete apparatus and written explanations to prove how they solved a problem. They enjoyed the challenge and showed a deep understanding of their work. However, this is not a consistent picture of the practice across the school. The mathematics scheme provides workbooks, and, in some cases, these are not used flexibly to meet pupils' needs. As a result, some pupils are not sufficiently challenged, particularly the most able.

While teaching has improved, there are still some aspects of classroom practice that are not as good as they could be. Teachers' questioning is improving, but is not yet strong. Sometimes, pupils are not challenged to, or given time to, explain their answer with appropriate depth. Furthermore, teachers' written demonstrations of answers or tricky concepts are not used in a timely way to help secure pupils' understanding.

Due to the improvements in teaching, pupils' progress is accelerating. When compared to the school's historical end of key stage 2 performance, the provisional test results for 2018 demonstrate that progress and attainment have improved. The most able pupils' progress is not as positive, particularly in reading.

You have put in place new arrangements for the management and monitoring of pupils' attendance. The school office has taken on responsibility for aspects of attendance. There is now a better analysis of absence rates, including persistent absence. Overall attendance is still not high, but persistence absence has improved.

One area that requires immediate action is the school's safeguarding policy. Staff have received training on the revised 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (2018) and are aware of the key changes. However, the governing body have not discussed or fully considered the new statutory requirements in their meetings so that they can properly update the policy.

Governors have gradually accepted the weaknesses that were identified at the previous inspection. The two governors who met with the lead inspector during this monitoring inspection were very reflective about where the governing body needs to improve. They acknowledged that the level of challenge needs to be raised. Meeting minutes demonstrate that challenge has already started to improve. Members of the governing body have not ensured that the website meets statutory requirements.

The local authority provides effective support to the school and is aware of

weaknesses that still need to be addressed. It has instigated support for mathematics in key stage 2 and in the early years.

In order to address the issues identified in this visit, governors and leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that the school website is fully compliant with the requirements set out by the Department for Education
- ensure that governors discuss the new statutory guidelines for safeguarding and make sure that the safeguarding policy is updated.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional school's commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**