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Mr Christopher Higgins
Headteacher
St John Southworth Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson
Lomeshaye Road
Nelson
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Higgins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John Southworth Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 24 June 2014, 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 March 2014. 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure governors check the action plan is working and on schedule, including making sure deadlines are tight enough to maintain a rapid pace of improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the Chair and two other governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plans and other documentation relating to school improvement were evaluated. A learning walk to see the impact of actions taken to improve the school, including the scrutiny of children's work in some books, was undertaken alongside the headteacher.

Main findings

School leaders and governors accept that the school's most recent inspection report gives a true reflection of the school's effectiveness. They are using it well to implement actions to improve the school that tackle the areas identified as requiring improvement.

The use of school based information and data relating to pupils' attainment and progress is improving rapidly. Data is more widely shared with teachers and has a more detailed focus on the performance of groups such as those pupils for whom the pupil premium funding is intended and those for whom English is an additional language. Consequently leaders at all levels are using this information more to hold staff to account for pupils' performance in English and mathematics across the school. Similarly, target setting has improved so that pupils understand more clearly what they have achieved and what is expected of them. Likewise, pupils understand more clearly how to improve their work to reach their targets because marking is getting better, particularly in English. Leaders recognise this is only the start of the journey and have appropriate plans to further enhance marking across all subjects to help pupils to make best progress.

Pupils' learning behaviours are improving because they are taught how to learn, and not just how to complete tasks. Assemblies focussed on exemplifying what a good learner looks like complement class teaching and are contributing to the acceleration of pupils' progress.

The deputy headteacher, who alongside all other members of the senior leadership team is new to her post, is growing in confidence and skill because of the support and training she has received from the local authority and associate headteacher. Leadership is improving because of the support and guidance given to the new leadership team from both the local authority and from an associate headteacher who works part time in the school. Leaders recognise they still have much to learn. However, their commitment to improvement is paying off and their skills and confidence increasing. Consequently the associate headteacher is leaving the school at the end of the summer term.

Leaders accept that their initial action planning in response to the inspection was not good enough. It lacked detail and measurable success criteria. This prohibited governors from effectively checking the pace of improvement. However, leaders have acted quickly upon advice and more recent planning is much better. It contains appropriate milestones and measurable expectations that allow governors to check that leaders' actions and decisions are working.

Subject leaders of English and mathematics have acted quickly to take actions to improve standards in their subjects by, for example, undertaking regular work and planning scrutiny to check the effectiveness of training. They are using their

evaluations well to inform future planning, and support and challenge individual members of staff to improve.

The teaching of mathematics is improving because of the tenacity of the subject leader. She has reviewed the school's calculation policy and is active in coaching colleagues in how to improve their teaching so as to have best impact on learning.

Teaching is improving because senior leaders have evaluated teachers' strengths and subsequently deployed teachers more effectively to make better use of them to increase standards. Additionally, the effectiveness of teaching assistants is getting better because of increased training and development. Coaching and shadowing opportunities for all those responsible for pupils' learning result in the sharing of good practice. The sharper use of targeted intervention groups, based more accurate data and the increasing skills of teaching assistants is having better effect on achievement, especially in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Governors are rising to the challenge of improving the school. The standards and effectiveness committee is working well. As a result, members of this group have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They recognise that they are now better informed by leaders and are beginning to be more challenging in holding them to account for the impact of their actions. However, they must now focus on checking that plans are on track and that deadlines in them are tight enough so as to maintain a rapid pace of improvement.

External support

Local Authority support is appropriate in helping this school to improve. Additional support including the organising of the associate headteacher and additional input from the local authority is improving standards of teaching and leadership.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire and as below.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools