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2 December 2014

Miss Julie Bainbridge  
Headteacher  
St Boniface RC Primary School  
Yew Street  
Salford  
Greater Manchester  
M7 2HL

Dear Miss Bainbridge

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Boniface RC Primary School, Salford**

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure the checks on teaching have a sharp focus on the impact of teaching on learning; provide teachers with precise targets to help them improve and make sure teachers tackle identified areas for improvement swiftly
- ensure the actions to improve teaching are identified clearly in the school improvement plan and build greater opportunities for emerging expertise to be shared more widely with teachers who need extra help to improve
- develop the indoor and outdoor learning areas so children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to the best start and other pupils in school are supported in their learning
- ensure the governors' role in driving improvement and the steps governors will take to improve their own effectiveness are clear in the school improvement plan.

## **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the assistant headteacher, two middle leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority and the diocese. I met with a small group of older pupils to gather their views about the changes in the school. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Your most recent school data, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Years 2 and 6, were considered. I also looked at records of your checks on teaching and a sample of minutes from governing body meetings. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books.

## **Context**

Three teachers have returned from extended leave. Three teachers are on temporary contracts. The leadership group has been streamlined; there is now one assistant headteacher who does not have a class responsibility this year. There are two vacancies on the governing body.

## **Main findings**

Although disappointed, no-one is arguing with the outcome from the recent inspection. Everyone is taking the findings seriously and all share a renewed determination to become a good school. There is no doubt considerable staff issues got in the way of your improvement journey last year and slowed the pace of change. Not all of these issues are resolved fully but staffing is more settled than it has been in a long while. This is setting you up well for the future because you no longer have to constantly bring new staff up to speed with whole-school policies and procedures.

No-one has stood still since the inspection and most of your actions are hitting the spot. However, change is not happening quickly enough to ensure all pupils benefit from good or better teaching day-in and day-out. Everyone is caught up in how far the school has moved rather than keeping a close eye on what more needs to be done to ensure the school makes the leap to good next time around. This focus on progress is clouding judgements and not helping you to move quickly to bring about the necessary change. There is not enough emphasis on the steps you will take to improve teaching in your action plan or how you will use the emerging good practice across the school to help those teachers who need extra help to lift their game.

You and the governing body have taken decisive and positive action to strengthen the capacity of the senior leadership team to drive improvement. As a result, your checks on teaching are happening frequently; gone are the days when these checks slipped because other more pressing issues came your way. Despite looking at teaching closely, you do not always get to the heart of the matter. Too much focus goes on whether teachers are following policies rather than looking at the difference teaching is making to pupils' learning. When you do spot areas where teachers need to get better, the feedback teachers receive is not always precise enough to help them know exactly what they need to do to improve. Sometimes, teachers do not

always take heed of your advice and guidance quickly enough so the weaknesses you have identified are not eradicated swiftly. You are looking at a range of information to get a flavour of the teaching pupils' typically experience each and every day. This is a positive move forward. However, when you pull all of the information together, your overall judgements are sometimes too generous. Subject leaders are keen to their bit and you are beginning to harness their skills to help improve teaching. There is scope to exploit their expertise further.

There are signs of success. Teachers are following the marking policy to the letter; pupils' books are well presented and teachers know exactly what to teach because of the time and money you have invested in introducing published schemes. Strengths are emerging in Key Stage 2 which are reflected in the 2014 unvalidated results. Year 6 pupils made stronger progress than in the past and reached the levels expected for their age. It is not such a rosy picture across all areas of the school. Only one in 3 children left the Early Years Foundation Stage with the skills and knowledge they need to get off to a flying start in Year 1. The results at the end of Year 2 remain below average and are following a gentle decline over time. Your own data show some pupils soared last year and made rapid progress, but in other cases progress was not strong enough. This means some pupils, particularly the current Year 6, are living with a legacy of underachievement; they have quite a journey to make if they are to do as well as all pupils nationally by the time they leave St Boniface.

Staffing issues last year played their part in the unevenness of pupils' achievement. Nonetheless, our findings today point to some areas which need swift attention. The purpose built indoor and outdoor areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not used to best effect to help children get off to a quick start. Younger pupils are struggling with weak handwriting skills and classrooms do not foster learning well enough by stimulating pupils' interest or providing helpful tips and prompts so pupils can get on with their work unaided.

The governing body share your desire to tackle weaknesses. They are generous with their time, attending meetings and visiting school often to find out how the land lies. They willingly seek and listen to advice and they take critical feedback because they have the pupils' best interests at heart. They have set up a committee to keep a close eye on the school's progress and they are benefitting from listening to the challenging questions a local authority and diocesan officer pose in these meetings. Governors know they will need further training and coaching so they are able to take-on this role when the local authority reduces its level of intensive support. Governors have little presence in the school's improvement plan and it is not clear what steps they are taking to improve their own effectiveness.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

You are open to advice and guidance and keen to get the views of external partners to help you see the school with fresh eyes. The local authority is supporting you well. It has brokered an effective partnership with a specialist leader in education from a local school. This support is helping teachers to improve the quality of their marking and aiding you in how you look at pupils' books to get a better picture of learning over time. A local authority officer visits you frequently and provides good levels of challenge because she knows the school very well. A local authority health check, which was due to take place today, is focused on exactly the right areas to help you see what has improved so far and what still needs to happen. The local authority and the diocese are seeking to find governors to fill the existing vacancies.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**