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Mrs Julie Pierce
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Upton
Moreton Road
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Merseyside
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Dear Mrs Pierce

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

Following my visit to your school on 14 January 2015, 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 October 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:

- review the action plan so it becomes a useful route map for everyone by:
 - ensuring the goals for success are clear and identify the difference your actions will make to teaching and pupils' achievement
 - including the small steps along the way so governors can keep a closer check on your success and challenge you if your actions falter
 - ensuring the role of the governing body in the improvement journey is explicit
- tighten the systems for checking on teaching so all leaders provide precise feedback to help individual teachers raise their game
- tackle the weaknesses in pupils' handwriting and presentation skills and ensure common errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are systematically corrected
- organise an external review of governance and use the finding to set an appropriate course of action to improve the effectiveness of the governing body.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with you, four senior leaders and two middle leaders. I met with two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I also chatted to a small group of older pupils to gather their views about the changes in the school. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I considered your most recent school information on pupils' achievement, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Year 2 and Year 6. 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

Since the October inspection, three members of the governing body have resigned leaving three vacancies. A temporary teacher left. This class is being taught by another temporary teacher.

Main findings

The wheels were already in motion to tackle weaknesses before the inspectors set foot in your school in October. The inspection report held no surprises; it confirmed you were on the right path and heading in the right direction. You, staff and governors all agree the inspection judgements are spot on. Everyone is pulling together, rolling up their sleeves and getting on with the job at hand. Consequently, the building blocks on which to cement future success are in place and St Joseph's is on the road to recovery.

Time is being used wisely to take stock. You recognise that more of the same is unlikely to serve the school well in the future. As a result, you are taking a different tack. A review of leadership roles means you are no longer shouldering more than your fair share of responsibility for driving improvement. New leaders are keen to play their part; they are making the most of the external support to improve their skills. All leaders are benefitting from coaching strategies which are helping them to find solutions to problems, tackle barriers head-on and work without close supervision. Consequently, the leadership team is becoming a cohesive unit who share the same goal.

It is clear you know what needs to happen to bring about improvement. Nonetheless, your action plan does not provide a good enough route map for your journey to good. The goals for success lack clarity. There is too much emphasis on what you will do and not enough detail about the difference your actions will make to teaching and pupils' achievement. The plan does not show the small steps you will take to bring about change. This means governors are not able to keep track of your success or challenge you if actions falter.

You check on teaching frequently; you know where it is strong and where teaching is not hitting the mark. You make sure teachers know what they need to do to raise

their game. However, this is not the case for all leaders because the feedback they provide does not always get to the heart of the matter. Too often feedback is over generous. Too much centres on whole-school issues rather than pin-pointing the precise actions each teacher needs to take to improve their teaching.

You, senior leaders and the governing body are under no illusions that there is a long haul ahead to ensure all teaching is the best it can be. Teachers are fully on board; everyone is following the new marking policy to the letter. However, some aspects of pupils' learning are not improving as quickly. In a few classes, the presentation of work in pupils' books is weak; pupils' handwriting skills are poor and basic errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation are not routinely corrected by teachers.

You are making headway in ensuring pupils are equipped for life in modern day Britain. The curriculum has been reshaped; a focus on 'rights and responsibilities' is underpinning your renewed focus on promoting tolerance and respect. Pupils' first-hand experience of different places of worship is beginning to foster a greater awareness of cultural diversity within the local community.

The strategies to tackle weaknesses are bearing fruit. Pupils' achievement improved across the board at the end of the last academic year. More pupils made typical progress and reached the levels expected for their age by the end of Year 6. Your own data show this positive improvement is being sustained and built on in reading and mathematics. Nonetheless, achievement in writing continues to lag behind and in some classes disadvantaged pupils are not making the same amount of progress as their peers.

The governing body are keen to play their part. A special committee has been set up to help governors keep a close eye on your progress against the action plan. The information you provide means governors are well informed about strengths and weaknesses. However, they are in the early stages of finding out about the school for themselves. Governors do not have a voice or a role in your action plan. Not enough thought has been given to the actions governors need to take to improve their own effectiveness. Further changes to the membership of the governing body in the near future means the time is right for an external review of governance.

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

Everyone values the close, extensive and varied support provided by the local authority. This is proving to be effective as it is tailored well to the school's needs. The work of a local authority officer has been instrumental in reviewing leadership roles and responsibilities while middle leaders are accessing local authority training to ensure they have the skills to do the job. The subject leader for English is benefitting from expert advice and guidance from a local authority officer to help lift pupils' achievement in writing. Officers are frequently checking your progress and making sure you have the support you need to make the leap to good at the next inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson

Her Majesty's Inspector