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Mrs Grainne Duffy

Headteacher

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe

Garburn Place

Newton Aycliffe

County Durham

DL5 7DE

Dear Mrs Duffy

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe

Following my visit to your school on 7 July 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, governors a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese. Additional meetings were held with two national leaders of education (NLE) who are supporting the leadership in the school. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated.

Context

The school has an acting headteacher due to the long-term absence of the headteacher. A new teacher started at the school in June 2015. A number of staff have recently returned to the school following periods of long-term absence.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The acting headteacher has taken prompt and effective action which has started to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. New approaches to classroom practice and behaviour management are seeing improvements in behaviours in classrooms and around the school. Targeted actions, well supported by a NLE and local authority staff, have begun to improve aspects of teaching. Actions have rightly focused on developing and ensuring that teachers improve their teaching. There has been an emphasis on developing and securing effective practice in the way pupils' work is marked, the feedback pupils receive to improve their learning and the way teachers plan further learning. More-accurate assessment has been secured with systematic checks between teachers and alongside staff from another school. Actions to improve the teaching of writing have begun to be implemented and guided reading has been introduced. As a result, improvement is beginning to be seen in progress made by pupils. In addition, leaders report an increasing confidence of parents in the school. However, some improvement actions are not captured clearly enough in the school's action plans.

More systematic and closer monitoring by leaders, well supported by the local authority, has ensured that staff are implementing agreed actions more quickly. As a result, leaders are developing a more accurate overview of the quality of teaching and learning. The school has some good examples of pupil tracking data to support this view. Checking and analysis of pupils' progress are being used more precisely to challenge individual teachers to improve their practice.

The safeguarding issues identified in the inspection have been dealt with. A safeguarding audit was carried out and further actions that were identified have been completed. School leaders recognise they need to develop safeguarding procedures further to ensure best practice across all aspects of this work.

Prompt action has been taken to minimise the impact of instability in staffing. The local authority, diocese and school governors have worked hard to stabilise staffing and leadership across the school. Additional support at leadership level has ensured that school leaders have stayed focused on the right priorities. However, some time has been lost and some actions for improvement will require revisiting to ensure that new and returning staff understand and are trained in new approaches.

Governors have increased their presence in the school and now work more closely with school senior leaders to ensure they are getting the information they require. In addition, training has helped them better understand data about pupils' progress. As a result, they have an increasingly clear understanding of what the school needs to do to improve and they increasingly hold school leaders to account. They have undertaken a review of their own effectiveness.

The school's plan for improvement includes all the areas of concern identified in the section 5 inspection. The actions identified are appropriate and implementation timescales are realistic. Key people have been identified to carry out the actions and check they have been carried out. The measures by which these plans will be judged are well defined. This is because targets rightly focus on the expected progress that all pupils should be making and the improvements in teaching that should enable this happen. Some targets for pupils' outcomes require sharpening to ensure there is sufficient challenge to raise standards quickly. A review of teachers' assessments undertaken by the school to establish an accurate baseline indicates that existing targets are not ambitious enough.

The local authority's support is well targeted at implementing and monitoring the school action plans and ensuring momentum is maintained despite turbulence in staffing and leadership arrangements. The local authority has supported the school well in evaluating the impact of recent actions. Local authority officers coordinate and review support for the school well with monthly meetings which include the diocese, governors and senior leaders. With the support of the diocese, leaders have set up links with good and outstanding schools to share best practice and secure judgements about how well the school is progressing.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's action plans are fit for purpose

The school may not appoint newly-qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director: Children's and Adults' Services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector