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Sarah-Jane Carroll
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Dear Miss Carroll

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve outcomes in reading for pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2
- track the progress of pupils so that governors, middle and senior leaders are fully informed about the progress of groups of pupils, particularly across the wider curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, the chair and three other members of the governing body. I also met with a

representative from the Archdiocese of Liverpool, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils. During these meetings, I discussed the actions taken since the last inspection and their impact. Learning walks were undertaken jointly with senior leaders and we looked at work in pupils' books. I evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised other key documentation, including documents relating to safeguarding.

Context

There have been a number of staffing changes since the school's most recent inspection including your appointment as headteacher. An assistant headteacher has been seconded to the school from an outstanding school in the Archdiocese of Liverpool. These appointments have brought welcome stability to the school in terms of leadership. In addition, there have been a number of staff who have left the school and several changes in the governing body.

Main findings

Following the most recent inspection, you and the governors worked with both the local authority and the archdiocese to successfully develop an effective leadership team. You have ensured that the leadership team now has the capacity to bring about the improvements necessary. You have been successful in uniting the staff at St Laurence's as they share your vision and ambition for the school. Considerable work has been undertaken to develop middle leaders so that they have the skills and knowledge to play a key role in improving outcomes in their areas of responsibility. Middle leaders now determine priorities for their subject areas and train other teachers to deliver the subjects confidently. As a result, leadership at all levels is now stable and able to effect change.

Leaders, governors and staff have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In the school improvement plan, leaders have identified appropriate priorities for the school, which will move it forward.

The governing body is led by a strong and able chair of governors who has ensured that new governors are well-qualified to work with leaders on this improvement journey. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and provide leaders with an appropriate level of support and challenge. Leaders at all levels are realistic yet ambitious. They are aware that some key areas still require improvement. However, your drive and passion to improve the experience of all pupils are unwavering. As a result, leaders are in a strong position to have a clear and positive impact on the quality of education that the school provides.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked hard to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. Leaders have introduced a range of approaches to ensure that teachers are confident to assess and moderate writing. Teachers and pupils are now very

clear on what pupils need to do to reach the expected standard in writing and how to improve their work so that it reaches the highest standards. Teachers create many opportunities for pupils to write in depth across the curriculum. The work seen in science books and religious education books, for example, shows that pupils can write with purpose and for a range of audiences. Some pupils are still limited in their range of vocabulary, but say that they enjoy writing. There are many examples of high-quality writing displayed and celebrated around school. Staff motivate even the younger pupils to write at length. For example, some pupils in Year 1 who had chosen to write about 'Alice in Wonderland' were keen to share their efforts with adults. As a result of these strategies, pupils' progress in writing improved from well below average in 2016 to average in 2017 for Year 6 pupils. Attainment in writing also improved considerably last year for Year 2 pupils, who achieved in line with the national average.

There are also improvements in the attainment of current pupils in reading. Leaders have introduced a range of approaches, such as daily reading sessions and class reads, to help pupils become confident readers. Teachers' focus on extending pupils' skills to infer and deduce the meaning of the text. These skills are helping pupils to develop their comprehension skills and this is beginning to have a positive effect on their progress. Leaders are working diligently to introduce pupils to high-quality texts to improve their vocabulary. There is still more to be done in this area though to fully embed new strategies, as leaders acknowledge.

The previous inspection identified that pupils needed to be challenged more to make them think harder and deepen their learning. Teachers incorporate challenge into lesson planning, ensure that additional activities are available and use questioning to probe pupils' understanding and reasoning. Teachers know their pupils well and match activities and support from teaching assistants accordingly. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in 2017 in reading, writing and mathematics rose considerably from the previous year.

At the last inspection, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities was not tracked precisely. Leaders have successfully created a clear tracking system for this group of pupils, which helps teachers to identify if pupils are falling behind so that effective interventions can be put in place swiftly. This is having a positive effect on teaching and learning and the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leadership of this area is strong as leaders know pupils well and closely monitor the impact of support so that pupils make progress.

Leaders are aware that although the current information provided by the school shows that pupils' attainment is improving in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics, progress is not tracked as clearly. Leaders are also aware that more work needs to be done to track pupils' attainment and progress across the

wider curriculum. This will then enable governors to hold leaders firmly to account for the progress of pupils across the curriculum and across all year groups.

The atmosphere at St Laurence's is calm and friendly. Pupils are well-mannered, smart and extremely proud of their school. They appreciate your work in improving the school. They value highly your praise and encouragement as you regularly celebrate their achievements, both inside and outside of school. Pupils would heartily recommend the school to others as they feel safe, well-cared for and enjoy their learning. As one pupil stated, 'I look forward to coming to school and want other children to experience the childhood I've had at this school.'

It is clear that all members of the school community, from governors to pupils, are working together to improve the school in all areas. Leaders are unwavering in their determination to ensure that their pupils receive only the best education. Despite the considerable improvements made in many areas, leaders and governors are aware that some time now is needed to embed the new systems and procedures so that they can have a marked impact on the outcomes of pupils.

External support

Leaders and governors have received effective support from the local authority and Archdiocese of Liverpool. The school has received leadership support and continues to work closely with advisers from the local authority and archdiocese. The school also makes effective use of strong links with other primary schools in the local collaborative. Both advisers, who know the school well, have every confidence that leaders and governors have the capacity to continue to move the school forward apace.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector