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11 December 2013

Mrs T Cooke  
Headteacher  
St Alban's Catholic Primary School  
Priory Lane  
Macclesfield  
Cheshire  
SK10 3HJ

Dear Mrs Cooke

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Cheshire East**

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 2013. 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 that:

- all teaching is at least good and challenges all pupils to make at least good progress in every lesson.
- all teachers accurately assess the progress of pupils and, through robust moderation, check the accuracy of their judgements, so that pupils' rates of progress speed up quickly, especially in the case of more able pupils and those who have a disability or special educational needs.
- all pupils, particularly the more able, are challenged to achieve beyond expected progress.
- leaders and managers who are new to the school, or to their roles and responsibilities, are well supported to work independently as quickly as possible and build the school's capacity to improve further.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone discussion took place with a National Leader of Education who is supporting your school's improvement. The school's post – Ofsted action plan was evaluated. I made a brief tour of the school with you to have an initial look at the quality of teaching and learning and of the learning environment. In addition I considered a range of documentation, for example, the records of your monitoring and evaluation of teaching. I also looked at your records on the impact of performance management, alongside your analysis of pupils' current rates of progress. I considered a small sample of pupils' written work.

## **Context**

There have been no significant changes to staffing or to the school's status since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement. However, you were appointed as headteacher only just over a year ago, before which the school was without a permanent headteacher for a considerable time.

## **Main findings**

You, senior leaders and the governors whom I met during my visit, show a clear understanding of what needs to be done in order for the school to become good as rapidly as possible. All of you are passionately committed to the school's improvement and have wasted no time in accepting the inspection judgement and moving forward together to tackle the recommendations for improvement outlined in the inspection report. Your approach to the task ahead is exceptionally open and honest, not only towards my visit but also as demonstrated by the parents' meeting at which you shared information about the school's position and your plans for 'getting to good.' This ethos of commitment to your wider community was evident during my visit.

Your Post-Ofsted Action Plan is detailed, clear and capable of helping the school to move to good within 12 to 24 months. Your questions for evaluating the progress of actions are particularly useful. Minor amendments would make the plan even more effective, for example, if it focussed more specifically on key groups of under-performing pupils, such as those with special education needs and more able pupils.

## **Achievement**

There have been a number of gains in the national tests of summer 2013, but you recognise that there is more work to be done.

From well above average starting points, 100% of pupils at Key Stage 1 passed the phonics check. Their standards in reading were significantly above average and

slightly above average in mathematics. Standards in writing were broadly in line with the national average. The standards of some of the pupils who have a disability or special educational needs were below the national average, but not significantly so.

At Key Stage 2 pupils' standards in reading and writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation were significantly above average. In mathematics and writing they were broadly average. Not enough pupils did as well as they could at the higher levels.

### **Progress**

Pupils' progress in reading and writing was similar to the national average and slightly above it in mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving more than expected progress was below average.

### **Teaching**

Your records of monitoring the quality of teaching show that about three-quarters of it is currently good and improving. It is set to reach 80% at least good by the end of the autumn term. Your performance management system is very rigorous and has supported your very hard work to eliminate almost all teaching that is less than good. You are ensuring that teachers improve their practice through support plans, coaching programmes and visits to other schools to observe good and outstanding teaching. You and the governors are not afraid to take strong action on the rare occasions when further challenge is needed. There is clear evidence that this support is having a positive impact, for example, in the consistent use of new marking arrangements that give pupils clearer information on how to improve their work.

You are aware that some teachers vary in their ability to use information on pupils' progress precisely, to arrive at consistently secure predictions about how well pupils will achieve. You have therefore increased opportunities for teachers to moderate each other's judgements within the school. The use of your strong links with your partner schools should provide opportunities to check judgements more widely and you understand that this is an urgent area for development.

### **Behaviour**

This was not an area for improvement at the last inspection, but it is important to note how very well the children behaved during my visit, showing early independence and confidence in interacting with each other and with adults respectfully and kindly in lessons and around the school, as befits the school's strong moral climate.

### **Leadership and Management**

All staff whom I met during my visit are strongly supportive of your clear direction for the school. You are strengthening the senior leadership team by widening its

membership and ensuring that the right people occupy roles in which they can be at their most effective.

It is important, for the 'journey to good' to be sustainable, that all new leaders are well supported and trained to work independently as quickly as possible, so that you as headteacher can maintain a sharp focus on strategic rather than operational decisions as the school progresses. Governors are a key support in this respect. They are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses and keen to play an active part in challenging the school to improve further. They have chosen to undertake a review of their practice to achieve this.

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 drawing well on a comprehensive range of external support for the school's improvement. You have strong links with a local outstanding secondary school and the headteacher (a National Leader of Education) has offered a significant programme of training to assist the school's improvement. The school's local cluster of primary schools is another source for the observation and exchange of good practice. Additionally, the local authority is to fund continuing professional development for staff, improvement activities in mathematics and English, training for the Special Needs Coordinator and additional time from the school's School Improvement Partner. The school has also taken full advantage of the local authority's programme for schools that require improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

### **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