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Mr Mark Parker
Headteacher
St Clement's Catholic Primary School
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Cheshire
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Dear Mr Parker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Clement's Catholic Primary School, Halton

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 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 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:

- work in partnership with the local authority and the Diocese to explore strategies that will develop leadership capacity in the short and long term
- develop teachers' mathematical subject knowledge so they are confident and competent in promoting pupils' problem solving and reasoning skills
- tighten the focus of monitoring activities so there is a sharper focus on pupils' learning and greater opportunities to check the quality of teaching during longer sessions in classrooms
- provide greater opportunities for governors to gather their own information about the school so they can offer well informed support and challenge to senior leaders.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the deputy headteacher and the English subject leader. I also met with four members of the governing body and a

local authority officer to discuss the action you have taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. School data, including the unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised. Your checks on teaching were also considered. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I also met with a small group of older pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

Context

Since the October inspection, the Year 1 teacher has left the school and the Year 5 teacher began a period of extended leave in December. Three new teachers took up post at the beginning of the spring term; one is in Year 1; one in Year 5 and one teacher is working alongside the Year 6 teacher to provide extra support for pupils.

Main findings

You have dusted yourself off and set about tackling the major shortcomings identified at the recent Ofsted inspection. You and the deputy headteacher are a cohesive team; you both understand there is a lot of work to do to ensure the school is judged good the next time an inspection team visit. Your clear action plan shows you know what needs to happen to improve teaching and help pupils make better progress over time.

Your work is beginning to have an impact. Teachers' marking has improved as a result of direct guidance and relentless checking to make sure everyone is following the agreed policy. Pupils are noticing the difference. They say they know what to do to improve and they like the opportunities to review their work or tackle extra challenges. Improvements to the Early Years Foundation Stage are leading to more purposeful teacher and child led activities.

You are tackling the weaknesses in reading quickly. All classrooms have reading areas; you have replenished the range of books so they meet pupils' interests and teaching sessions have been re-organised so all pupils have the opportunity to read for purpose and for pleasure. Pupils are full of praise for these changes. They are keen to read because they have a hand in selecting the new books and they enjoy using the electronic reading devices. Progress has been slower in mathematics. Resources are being refreshed and a published scheme of work has been introduced to make sure pupils do not miss out on key mathematical skills and ideas as they move throughout the school. However, pupils' books show the opportunities to solve problems remain limited and not enough attention is being given to developing teachers' mathematical subject knowledge.

Improving teaching is a key area for the school. A lot of time is directed to whole-school training and individual support to help teachers update their skills. Pupils' books show this is beginning to bear fruit, but there is much to do, particularly in Key Stage 2, to ensure pupils make better than expected progress. You have refined your processes for checking on teaching so that teachers who need extra help to improve are getting more attention. Nevertheless, these checks do not always get to the heart of the matter. Too much time is spent dipping into lessons rather than

staying in classrooms for more sustained periods of time and you do not always check the quality of learning when you look at pupils' books.

You have made a good start on tackling weaknesses because you and your deputy headteacher have worked flat out to deliver the action plan. The biggest barrier to your continued success is the capacity of all leaders to drive improvement as too much responsibility is currently resting on your shoulders.

The governing body are responding to the criticisms about their effectiveness with appropriate urgency. Immediate action has led to an additional committee being established to keep a closer check on the school's progress and the external review of governance will be completed by the end of January. Governors are beginning to offer greater challenge because their grasp and use of school data is improving. Nonetheless, governors are still too reliant on you to provide information because they are in the earliest stages of finding out about the school's progress for themselves.

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 using a range of expert support effectively. A thorough audit of mathematics teaching led by an external consultant has helped you unpick the key weaknesses in teaching which are holding pupils' back. An English consultant is helping the subject leader drive improvements in the teaching of reading. Your desire to learn from others is reflected in the close partnerships you have forged with other schools in the authority and the links you have made with a local leader of education. These relationships are helping you develop management systems, consider different approaches to leadership and enabling teachers to visit other schools to learn from best practice. You are also working closely with the local authority who has increased its level of support following the recent inspection. This is helping individual teachers improve their skills in assessing pupils' work and planning activities to help pupils' succeed. You are well aware of the need to extend leadership capacity. As a result, you are keen to work with the Diocese and local authority to explore strategies that can maximise capacity in the short and long term.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector