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13 February 2014

Mrs Linda Mousdale
Headteacher
St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School
Boardmans Lane
Blackbrook
St Helens
Merseyside
WA11 9BB

Dear Mrs Mousdale

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. A short meeting was held with the senior leadership team. The local authority's statement of action and the school's post-Ofsted action plan were evaluated. A range of other documentation was considered. These included the school's records of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, of the performance management of staff and arrangements for their continuing professional development and the latest information on students' current achievement. A brief tour of classrooms was also made.

Context

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the last section 5 inspection.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

You, your senior leaders and governors have made a positive start to improving the school's performance by focusing sharply on the recommendations for improvement from your last

inspection. In the relatively short time since the last inspection you have continued to prioritise the improvement of teaching. The impact of your work can be seen in the reduction this year of teaching that is less than good and the eradication of inadequate teaching. Most teaching is now therefore good, with some examples of outstanding practice. You are aware that a greater proportion of outstanding teaching is necessary to raise students' achievement quickly enough for the school to be removed from the judgement of serious weaknesses within the next 18 months.

You have introduced a new teaching policy and strengthened the school's systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning. This is already leading to consistent improvements in marking, producing helpful dialogues between teachers and students about their learning. Arrangements for the performance management of teachers are sharper: you and your governors have shown determination to refuse salary progression to senior leaders and teachers who have not achieved their targets.

Governors have developed their knowledge and understanding of assessment information sufficiently well to ask challenging questions to subject leaders at regular meetings to review students' progress. They ensure that the school is on a sound financial footing and are increasing their understanding of the impact of the school's use of pupil premium funding on students' achievement. In order to be even more effective the governing body has decided independently to undertake a review of their practice.

The impact of your work has not yet had time to be seen fully in students' performance in external examinations. However the school's most recent assessment information points to improving attainment. Progress is stronger in mathematics than in English, but the proportions of students who are making expected progress in both are rising. You recognise that some gaps remain in the proportions of students who make more than expected progress.

The local authority sets out in its statement of action a clear and detailed package of expert support that is consistent with the school's post-Ofsted action plan. Both these documents show the capacity to drive the school's improvement in order for it to be removed from the serious weaknesses judgement within the next 18 months. The school has additionally forged links with a local teaching school for the sharing of good practice.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's post-Ofsted action plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector