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14 July 2014

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 11 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the second 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 are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders and two representatives of the governing body, to discuss the action you have taken to improve the school since the last inspection. A range of documents was considered during the inspection, including the 'post Ofsted action plan,' which was evaluated, and records of the outcomes of monitoring activities, information about pupils' progress and of the impact of performance management. A recent report from a local authority officer, who has been supporting the school's improvement, was also considered. A sample of pupils' written work across the school was scrutinised. I made brief visits to four classes, during which I looked at the quality of teaching and learning. I also considered the 97 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Context

There have been no staffing changes since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and senior leaders continue to make rapid progress in ensuring that the school becomes good. This is because you and your senior leaders share a very clear vision of what the school needs to do in order to achieve this aim. You are all enthusiastic and fully committed to the school's improvement. The impact of your approach is seen in the fact that in the short time since the last inspection you have successfully tackled all the areas for improvement that the inspectors recommended.

During this year, you have raised dramatically the achievement of most pupils and pupil groups across a range of measures, including in mathematics, which was formerly an area of weakness. Most gaps in progress are narrowing for those pupils who are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding). Some gaps have closed entirely. This improvement stems from your wise decisions about how to spend the additional funding. Progress gaps for some pupils who have a disability or special educational needs are also narrowing, through your uncompromising commitment to raise the quality of teaching. In particular, interventions to improve pupils' reading and writing have accelerated their progress markedly.

Pupils who need more support are now identified more accurately and support is better tailored to their needs. The impact of support for individual pupils with the most complex needs is seen in the small steps of progress that they make over time. The school has an impressive track record of welcoming vulnerable pupils, who have found it difficult to settle in other schools, and leading them to successful outcomes.

You and the senior leaders have adopted a very determined and systematic approach to improving the school. Staff are well supported and challenged and are increasingly skilled and confident in holding others to account for different aspects of the school's work. You have put in place extremely robust and regular procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning. It is evident from records of your own moderation and that of external consultants, that all teaching is now consistently good, with a significant proportion that is outstanding. Your marking policy makes sure that teachers give consistently helpful feedback to pupils on how they can improve their work and a real dialogue of learning is evident between pupils and their teachers.

Systems of target setting for performance management also hold the teaching staff to account effectively by means of very rigorous targets tightly linked to pupil's progress. Your strong focus on assessment across the school has been fundamental to the improvements in teaching, which have in turn greatly improved outcomes for pupils, with more of them set to reach the highest levels this year. Behaviour during the inspection, both in lessons and around the school, and in terms of pupils' attitudes to learning, was exemplary. The large majority of parents are

overwhelmingly positive about the school. Pupils say that while there are occasional friendship problems and rare instances of misbehaviour from a very small minority of pupils, they find the school a happy and safe place where they enjoy their learning. They appreciate the wide range of visits and after-school activities that the school offers, take pride in their work and are confident in speaking with adults.

The pupils are highly articulate children with a strong sense of right and wrong, who can recognise kindness in their teachers and in each other. This is because they learn at school how to practise kindness to others from the school's strong moral, social and spiritual ethos that permeates all its work.

Governors have strongly underpinned the school's rapid journey through improvement. They are knowledgeable professionals who have understood exactly the issues that have previously prevented the school from becoming good and have been highly effective in supporting and challenging the school in equal measure and in celebrating its successes. The significant improvements to pupils' achievement over the last year, their exemplary behaviour and the now consistently good quality of teaching have been driven by your tireless focus, together with senior leaders and governors, on improving the school, demonstrating the school's strong capacity to improve further.

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

The school is very well linked to the local authority and has taken full advantage of everything it has to offer in order to improve the school. You have also been supported by external consultants and high-performing local schools in improving the school's practice. You are beginning to look increasingly outward in order to strengthen the school still further.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, 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 schools