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

Dear Mrs Mousdale

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

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children and Young People's Services for St. Helens and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good in order to raise standards across all subjects, in mathematics and particularly in English, so that all groups of students make at least good progress that is sustained over time, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers make effective use of assessment data when planning activities to enable all groups of students to learn more quickly
 - ensuring that learning activities are imaginative and relevant and are designed in a way that deepens students' understanding of the subject being taught
 - providing further opportunities for students to talk about and consolidate their learning in class
 - ensuring that teachers' marking of students' work consistently provides students with clear and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve and that teachers' written comments are always followed up by students.
- Further improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - sharing more widely the good and outstanding practice that currently exists in the school
 - ensuring that the school's systems to track and monitor students' progress are used well to evaluate the achievement of all groups of students and to ensure they achieve equally well.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 9 October 2014

Evidence

I met with you and your senior leadership team, a group of students, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body. I also held a discussion with a representative from the local authority and from the archdiocese. I considered a wide range of documentation concerning aspects of the school's work, including your records of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and evaluated the programme of professional development that the school provides for staff. I scrutinised a sample of written work from students across the age and ability range to judge progress over time. The focus of the inspection was the progress made by the school in tackling the recommendations for improvement made at the section 5 inspection of October 2013, especially those related to the improvement of students' progress over time in English and mathematics.

Context

Five teachers have joined the school since the second monitoring visit, including three trainee teachers following the Teach First programme.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The very clear and determined direction you set for the school only a year ago is underpinned by your establishment of a very strong, united senior leadership team that, together with governors, shares your uncompromising attitude to any underperformance. This has allowed you to build with remarkable speed on the already significant improvements that I noted during the second monitoring inspection in May 2014. High-quality systems and procedures are very effectively used, notably by a very capable, well-trained team of subject leaders, to promote improved outcomes for students that are at the heart of the school's vision. These leaders are a key factor in the capacity of the school to improve further. Governors are well trained in assessment information and knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for development and are keen to keep their practice under review. They mount an effective challenge to the school.

Improved outcomes for students are evident in unvalidated assessment information for 2014, compared to the 2013 results. For example, in a single year the key measure of five A* to C GCSE grades has risen by 16 percentage points. The proportion of students who made expected and more than expected progress in English has improved by 21 and 16 percentage respectively. Progress in mathematics has shown a year-on-year rising trend but gains are not as strong in the data for 2014 as in English. Those students who have a disability or special educational needs made similar progress to their peers in English but the school knows there is more work to be done to ensure that they do equally well in mathematics and that any gaps in the progress of some disadvantaged students are

swiftly narrowed. Evidence from your very reliable systems for tracking students' progress indicates that the momentum of improving achievement is set to be sustained in the 2015 results.

These rapid gains in students' achievement are a result of a very logical, well-phased approach to the school's improvement that is worthy of being shared more widely. Your central ambition is the building of excellence in teaching and learning across the school. The forensic approach of leaders and managers at all levels to the use of assessment information has been channelled into classrooms and student progress meetings and enables subject departments to be held very closely to account for their students' achievement. Governors play an effective part in this accountability and fully support the hard staffing decisions necessary when high-quality support is not sufficient to improve practice. As a result your records show almost no teaching over time that is less than good. In particular, you have achieved a high level of consistency in the quality of marking and written feedback to students about their work, resulting in a genuine dialogue between teachers and students, so that the latter are very well engaged in their learning.

The school keeps its curriculum under regular review and you are careful to adjust it to the changing, precise learning needs of the students. You are relentless in ceasing courses and methods of support that prove ineffective. Students can point to areas of the curriculum that help them to practise kindness and friendliness to others, including those who are different from themselves. They feel well taught to keep themselves safe, including from cyber and other forms of bullying. A key strength of the school is its imaginative work to give students practical experience of the democratic process and the personal responsibilities that this entails. Students speak highly of their teachers and other staff for their approachability and ready support at any time. This is partly why students' behaviour, including their attitudes to learning, seen during my visit, was very positive. Parent surveys demonstrate equally positive views about the school's work.

Everything that the school does is carefully considered and regularly valued. While being very willing to listen to advice, you show great strength and independence in making astute decisions about what is likely to be the most effective support for the school's improvement. All of this has enabled the school, in the short time since the last inspection, to tackle successfully all the recommendations from the last inspection report and to demonstrate a very strong capacity for the further improvement of the school. I would recommend that the next inspection be a full section 5 re-inspection.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Your calm, resolute approach, supported by leaders at all levels, including governors, to the rapid improvement of the school

- Your carefully considered approach to improvement planning, high expectations of staff and students and strong systems to hold staff to account and support them in equal measure
- The thoughtful selection of available external support, matched precisely to the school's needs
- The very strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning as the key factor in the school's improvement.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There are no significant weaknesses in the school's approach to securing further improvement.

External support

The school enjoys a positive relationship with the local authority, whose representatives continue their commitment to supporting the school's improvement. The negotiation of the services of specialist leaders of education has contributed to improvements in teaching and learning.