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Mr Mark Parker
Headteacher
St Clement's Catholic Primary School
Oxford Road
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 4NX

Dear Mr Parker

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

Following my visit to your school on 24 November 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.

This 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 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 with the governing body to find out what some parents are not content with certain aspects of school and use these findings to strengthen parents' role as partners in the next stage of the school's journey
- spend time finding out why disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs make slower progress than their classmates and put swift action into place to help them make greater gains in their learning.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the deputy headteacher, four members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I chatted to a small group of older pupils to gain their views on the changes that have taken place since the last inspection. I visited each classroom to observe teaching, watch pupils at work and to check the quality of pupils' work in their books. Your

most recent school data, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Years 2 and 6, were considered. I looked at records of your checks on teaching and documentation related to the work of the governing body. I considered the 28 responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire) and chatted to a small group of parents in the playground to gain their views on the school.

Context

Five of the current teachers have been appointed since the last inspection. There have also been a number of temporary teachers in different classes during this period. The Year 6 teacher is on long-term absence. This class is being covered by two temporary teachers. The Year 4 teacher is on loan from another school within the Diocese. A new governor was appointed in September 2014.

Main findings

St Clement's is transforming and swiftly heading back to its former glory. The secret of your success is simple. You are taking the right action to tackle weaknesses head-on and you are devoting time and energy to improving teaching. As a result, the shortcomings identified by inspectors this time last year are being eradicated and the school is growing stronger day-by-day.

Staff turnover during this time has been high; only a handful of the current teachers were in post during the last inspection. However, no-one has used this potential barrier to success as a reason to take their eye off the ball. Instead you have looked for solutions to make sure pupils' learning does not falter and they get the best out of their time at school.

Your work is reaping rewards. Pupils' achievement is the best it has been for a long while. Children left Reception with the skills and knowledge they need to make a successful start in Year 1 and Year 2 pupils achieved well compared to all pupils nationally. The Year 6 results are a cause for celebration. Pupils made better than expected progress from their different starting points. Consequently they joined their secondary school two terms ahead of other pupils in the country. No group underachieved. Nonetheless, disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs did not make the same rapid progress as their classmates.

Pupils' achievement in reading used to be a weakness; this is no longer the case. The refurbished school library is at the heart of your drive to promote reading and encourage pupils to explore and enjoy books. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is also becoming stronger. The systematic teaching of basic skills and the daily 'Speedy Sums' sessions are building pupils' confidence and competence with mental calculations so they are not afraid to tackle mathematical problems. Some teachers are leading the way; they are increasingly skilled in harnessing pupils' reasoning and logic skills to solve mathematical problems systematically. Although pupils do as well in writing, your own data and your checks on teaching point to this being your next priority for improvement. This matches completely with my findings during the day. Some pupils have poor handwriting skills; some struggle to spell accurately and not

enough have the resilience or stamina to develop as young writers because they are not given enough opportunity to write at length.

Teaching is improving nicely over time. Your views on teaching are spot on because you take the time and trouble to check what you see in the classroom with the work in pupils' books and school data. This means you are gaining an accurate view of the teaching pupils typically experience day-in and day-out. You are pinpointing the small steps individual teachers need to take to raise their game further and the support teachers are receiving is matched to their individual needs. You have set your stall out; guidance for teachers is clear so no-one is in any doubt about the expectations you hold for staff and pupils. As a result, new staff are able to hit the ground running and time is not lost while they get used to whole-school systems. The work of the deputy headteacher has been particularly successful in improving teaching. Her expert guidance, support and coaching for individual teachers has been costly in terms of time, but it is paying dividends, as she is helping to unleash potential and help teachers to flourish.

Teachers are buying into your way of working. Pupils' books show teachers' increasing expectations of what pupils can achieve. Marking is thorough and helps pupils see common errors so they are less likely to make the same mistakes in the future. Teachers are far more skilled in making pupils' learning lively and interesting, using a wider range of resources to promote pupils' confidence in mathematics and encouraging them to put pen to paper. There is less chance of pupils falling through the cracks during lessons because all adults circulate around groups to check on pupils' progress and provide extra support when they struggle.

Everyone took my concerns about you and the deputy headteacher taking too much responsibility for the school's improvement journey seriously. You have tried a number of strategies to spread the load more widely, but none have been entirely successful. This is mostly due to circumstances beyond your control. No-one can deny that you both still do too much. However, this is not getting in the way of delivering your planned actions because there is greater capacity across the school. You can call on more teachers to share good practice and the improving governing body is helping to strengthen leadership. Your success to date means you can see the wood for the trees. Previously, there was a lot that needed tackling; now you are able to concentrate on the finer details. You have a clear view of what needs to happen and the calls on your time are not quite as demanding.

Pupils speak highly of the changes you are making. They all think these are for the better and are making a difference to their learning and enjoyment of school. They are in favour of the structured approach to the day which means there is no danger of some subjects, particularly reading, falling off the timetable as it used to in the past. They recognise behaviour is good, but not perfect, because there is still some 'messaging about' from time-to-time. However, they are unanimous in their view that teachers are much better at tackling weaker behaviour so learning is not disrupted.

Some of the parents I spoke to are positive about the difference recent changes are making to their children. However, not all of the parents I met or those who have

responded to Parent View are happy with certain aspects of school life. Your own recent survey of parents' views paints a more positive picture, although just under a third are not sure if the school deals with bullying effectively. You and the governors are not burying your head in the sand about this feedback. You recognise the time is right to get to the bottom of these concerns so you can secure parents as partners in the next stage of your journey.

The governing body have kept pace with you. They know the school well because they are much better informed about what is happening and they are confident to ask hard questions. Their mantra of 'show me as well as tell me' is serving them well in making sure the information you produce is a true reflection of teaching and pupils' achievement. They are giving their time freely, reviewing their own skills, attending training and visiting the school frequently. The 'Journey to Good' committee have been a useful ally in ensuring you are on track with your planned actions and that your work is having the desired impact. Governors are as frustrated as you that your plans to enhance middle leadership have not worked out as well as everyone hoped. Nonetheless, they are adamant that pupils' learning will not falter as a result. They are directing financial resources to provide additional teachers in some classes to help pupils who may be lagging behind catch up quickly.

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 have sought external support from a range of partners. This has widened your horizons and is helping teachers to capitalise on expertise within, and outside of, the local authority. You are using this support well, listening to and acting on advice. The work of English and mathematics consultants has been instrumental in improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement. Links with a partner school is helping teachers enhance their skills in checking on pupils' progress accurately. An external School Improvement Partner visits school regularly, acting as a sounding board to new ideas and a useful source of expert advice. Local authority officers are close at hand to keep a close eye on your progress.

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