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Mr Tom Walker
Headteacher
St Aloysius' Catholic Primary School
143 Woodstock Road
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX2 7PH

Dear Mr Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Aloysius' Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2015, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. 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:

- refine the raising achievement plan so it is clear how success will be measured against outcomes achieved by pupils
- ensure leaders make regular checks of teachers' planning.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, several governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, other senior leaders and a representative from Oxfordshire Local Authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's raising achievement plan. In addition, I scrutinised other school documentation including records of leaders' monitoring activity. The single central

record was checked. I joined you on a tour of the school and visited every year group, taking the opportunity to look at pupils' work.

Context

Since the previous inspection one class teacher has left. A newly qualified teacher joined in November 2014 and has responsibility for Year 4 pupils.

The local authority has conducted a review of governance. The governing body is in a transitional phase as the Chair of the Governing Body is intending to resign this week. The process for electing a new chair is well underway with completion expected imminently. The governing body retains an interest in the possibilities of becoming an academy although there are no firm intentions to convert.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have revisited existing systems and procedures, redoubling your expectations with staff appropriately. You recognise that despite clear procedures in place at the previous inspection, staff did not always implement these consistently. You describe some ways of working as having become 'a little tired.' The report findings have served to reinvigorate leaders and there is a revitalised, more positive approach. Consequently, all staff feel re-energised, sharing your optimism for the journey to become a good school. There is a tangible sense of making a fresh start.

Leaders and governors have written a helpful plan outlining the key actions to be taken and by when. Leaders have underpinned the plan by adopting a new and more thorough approach to checking on success. More regular and timely checks by leaders and governors are helping to maintain the momentum of improvement. You expect everyone to be fully involved in evaluating whether the plan is improving the school. As a result, morale is high and a positive team spirit pervades. The plan would benefit from clearer targets for pupils' progress and attainment to help keep a sharp focus on how well pupils are learning and achieving. Equally, clearer targets would enable governors to hold the school to account with even greater rigour.

Leaders have begun using a number of different approaches to improve the quality of teaching. Staff have recently completed useful training, including helpful discussions about getting the conditions for learning right. You are rightly determined to maximise learning time and your detailed analysis has led to an understanding of where time has been lost in the past. There is a clear commitment to securing a prompt start to all lessons. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils were keen to get started, organising themselves efficiently with appropriate resources, in order to round large numbers to the nearest 10,000. However, you acknowledge that more is required, particularly in ensuring pupils

understand what is expected of them during any given task. When they are unsure, time is wasted and their progress slows.

Expectations for teachers' marking and pupils' presentation are now clearer and displayed in every classroom as an aide memoire. When we looked at pupils' work together, you noted that, despite closer attention to annotating mistakes, pupils do not routinely correct errors. Therefore, opportunities are missed to help them learn from their mistakes. Most pupils write using a cursive script and work has begun to improve the presentation of their work even further.

In evaluating the quality of teaching, leaders are making more use of a variety of information, including from the scrutiny of pupils' work, learning walks and lesson observations. The local authority has provided valuable support and conducted regular checks alongside senior leaders. However, leaders do not yet habitually check the quality of teachers' planning. As a result, in mathematics for example, leaders are unsure if pupils have covered all the topics set out for the autumn term. The quality of teaching remains variable. Plans to support teachers to improve areas of weaknesses in performance are at a very early stage.

Middle leaders are using their expertise to improve their subjects. The literacy coordinator has made a useful visit to a local primary school to observe different ways of working. Leaders' actions to improve the teaching of phonics, the sounds that letters make, have had a notable impact very quickly. Staff, including teaching assistants, have received useful training. The coordinator has also benefited from additional time to monitor the quality of phonics teaching so staff now receive regular support and advice. As a result, there are higher expectations and pupils are making better progress than in the past. Consequently, many more pupils are achieving the standards expected for their age than in previous years.

The teacher with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs is also now the school's 'pupil premium champion'. You have defined her role more clearly and she has revised the approach to helping this group of pupils. Through regular discussions with staff, closer attention is being given to making sure that pupils' receive well-matched support. During the visit, a small group of pupils were being helped by a specialist teacher to develop their understanding of the mathematical terms small, medium and large. Carefully tailored support is improving pupils' confidence and helping disadvantaged pupils to make better progress than in the past.

Behaviour is improving. You have introduced new procedures for lining up and pupils have responded positively. Changeover times between playtime and the start of learning are now slicker and less time is lost. Pupils are generally attentive in class. However, when activities are less engaging or pupils are unclear what is expected, attention wanes.

The governing body is currently entering a transitional phase while they elect a new chairperson. Despite this, governors have remained focused on the job in hand and involved themselves fully in supporting leaders to improve the school. Helpful amendments have been made to the raising achievement plan and governors are keen to begin gathering information for themselves first hand.

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 local authority is knowledgeable about the school and has reacted promptly to the inspection findings. A useful post-inspection record of actions has been established which focuses appropriately on undertaking checks on the quality of teaching. Consequently, the authority has a clear view of which support will be most useful to leaders. Already, helpful visits to other schools have taken place to support subject leaders to develop the teaching of phonics and mathematics in particular. A helpful and detailed review of governance has been conducted.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector