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Mr Brendan Tapping
Executive Headteacher
St Bede's Catholic Comprehensive School and Byron College
Westway
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 1DE

Dear Mr Tapping

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Bede's Catholic Comprehensive School and Byron College, Durham

Following my visit to your school on 24 April 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 January 2015. 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:

- ensure the action plan, arising from the review of the governing body's effectiveness, links to the school improvement plan, includes criteria against which the impact of actions can be measured and has timescales that guarantee work is carried out as a matter of urgency
- enable teachers of weaker subjects to observe and learn from outstanding practice in other schools
- further develop the work with, and challenge from the local authority.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the Executive Headteacher and the Head of School, four members of the senior management team, representatives of the governing body, a group of students and the Education Development Partner from the local authority. I visited four classrooms with a senior leader where we observed

students' learning, reviewed their books and spoke to them about their work and the school. I scrutinised the school's improvement plan and other information including minutes from the most recent governing body meetings.

Context

At the time of the inspection, the interim Executive Headteacher had been in post for three weeks. The Diocese secured this part-time position from the school where he is a substantive headteacher, St Wilfrid's Roman Catholic College, South Tyneside, until August 2015. Since the inspection, the Executive Headteacher's post has been extended to September 2016. This is to provide stability of leadership and to enable him to see through the school's journey to good. The Executive Headteacher has completed reviews of the school's financial arrangements, staffing, curriculum and pastoral support.

Main findings

The Executive Headteacher and Head of School, worked swiftly to develop and implement an action plan to tackle the areas requiring improvement in the inspection report. They are currently refining the plan to include more measurable targets so that governors can hold leaders to account more effectively for the impact of actions on students' achievements and the quality of teaching and leadership. The Executive Headteacher harnessed rapidly the commitment and enthusiasm of senior leaders, staff and governors in his quest to drive the school to good quickly. There are early signs of impact. Following a thorough review of the quality of teaching, each member of staff has undertaken individual training specific to their identified needs. More coaching and support is planned for those who need it. Some students who spoke to me say they can see the difference in some lessons where work set is more challenging for them. Virtually all who spoke to me reported that they could see teachers' better use of the marking policy in some of their work books. Students report that when done well, teachers' marking and comments are helping them to identify what they need to improve and highlight what they are doing well. They say they like the opportunities they have to correct errors and improve their work before they move on to the next piece of work. Leaders know there is still more to do to ensure the good practice in some classes is extended to all. Students report great satisfaction with the changes to lunch times where there are now two-sittings. They have noticed that teachers' more consistent application of the new behaviour policy is leading to a tangible improvement in students' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and across the school.

Procedures for checking students' progress have improved in both timeliness and rigour. The Executive Headteacher is involving senior and middle leaders more regularly in this work. Senior leaders value the increased contribution they are making to whole-school improvement priorities. They report they are being held to account more robustly for their team's work and their students' achievements. Senior leaders speak highly of the development opportunities they have had in carrying out joint observations with senior staff from St Wilfrid's, an outstanding

college and the support from two other outstanding Catholic schools, Cardinal Hume and St Thomas More to improve their leadership and subject specialist skills. With the exception of modern foreign languages, teachers of weaker subjects have not had opportunities to observe and learn from outstanding practice in other schools.

Governors report there has been a step-change in the expectations of their role and they are beginning to be more involved in the work of the school. The review of governance is complete and the action plan is in the process of development. This does not yet include measurable success criteria or timescales that suggest a sense of urgency to improve the governing body's effectiveness in holding leaders to account for the planned improvements.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

School leaders drew on support from the outstanding Catholic schools quickly. This support is helping to drive improvements in the quality of teaching, middle and senior leadership and modern foreign languages teaching. Before the inspection, a new local authority Education Development Partner (EDP) was allocated to the school. Transition arrangements from the previous EDP are now complete. Shortly after the inspection, the authority worked with the Diocese and governors to secure the longer-term appointment of the Executive Head Teacher. Regular meetings between senior local authority officers, school leaders and key governors are being set up to increase the challenge to leaders and to monitor the impact of the school's work. Subject-specialist advisers from the local authority are being identified to support the school in key subjects. These initiatives have yet to take place therefore it is too soon to see the impact of such work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children and Adult Services for Durham and the Diocese of Newcastle and Hexham.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector