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Mr John McAuley  
Headteacher  
Newman Catholic School  
Lismore Place  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA1 1NA

Dear Mr McAuley

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Newman Catholic School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 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. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 strengthen the initiatives already started by:

- developing work scrutiny further so it is more probing about the level of challenge, quality of students' work and their rates of progress
- analysing information gained from observations of teaching, tracking of students' progress and work scrutiny in order to provide teachers with incisive guidance on how to improve students' learning
- adding quantifiable milestones which measure students' progress to improvement planning.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders, two members of the Governing Body and students to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke with a representative of the Diocese and a representative of the local authority by telephone. I visited classes during lessons and sampled students' work. I evaluated the school's improvement planning and the impact of monitoring activities.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, the governing body has been strengthened with new membership. The senior leadership team is in the process of being restructured.

## **Main findings**

You are leading improvements effectively. The implementation of the action plan to tackle areas requiring improvement is progressing well. It is a strong plan with relevant actions set within a realistic timescale. The milestones show what is to be achieved at key points clearly, so that governors and leaders can monitor the plan's progress. It would be helpful to add to these, some measures of students' progress and attainment, so that you can evaluate the impact of actions on students' achievement.

Staff are motivated and determined to bring about improvement quickly and effectively. They have welcomed the increased levels of accountability and are keen to take on more responsibility where it is called for. Students are also keen to play their part in improving the school. They are very positive about the new approach to promote effective behaviour for learning and are looking forward to having more opportunities to contribute their views on what helps them to learn successfully.

The areas requiring improvement in teaching focus on: better promotion of literacy skills; increasing the impact of marking; and providing greater levels of challenge for the most able students. You have made a concerted effort to ensure literacy skills are promoted in all subjects. The literacy working group is providing a good steer and is a useful forum for teachers to share ideas. The English department is taking the lead but teachers in all subjects now share the responsibility to make sure students are accurate and fluent in their use of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Students' work shows there is an increased focus on key vocabulary and the quality of their written work is improving. Students talk positively about the higher expectations and know that 'only our best work will do'.

The focus on reading and speaking is helping students to develop their language and understanding across a range of subjects. In the mathematics lesson I visited, students learned from each other effectively when they were pressed to explain what they need to do to plot three-dimensional shapes onto a grid. Younger

students who need more help with their reading are benefitting from additional tutoring from sixth formers. The introduction of a new programme to support reading in Key Stage 3 is at early stages and you are rightly checking carefully that it has the intended impact.

The marking policy is being applied consistently. There is some very effective practice, but still some variability in the impact it has. Where marking works best, it gives students precise guidance on how to improve their next piece of work, correct errors or extend understanding. Occasionally the comments made by teachers lack impact because students do not have an opportunity to act on them.

You have taken steps to ensure teaching provides more challenge to the most able students and further professional development on this aspect is planned. Teachers are now aware of the most able students in each teaching group and senior leaders are checking for challenge in teachers' lesson planning. There is still further work to do to ensure work is suitably challenging for students in Key Stage 3, especially in Year 7, but improvements are underway. The move to extend challenging activities beyond the classroom, for example into the after-school STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) club is positive; there is great potential to develop the level of challenge in other such activities.

You have strengthened the impact of leadership through the introduction of more systematic approaches to monitoring students' progress. The introduction of fortnightly departmental meetings ensures that subject leaders have a clearer overview of students' learning in their subject. The new approach to checking students' books is helping leaders to assess the impact of teaching over time. There is some very good practice in work scrutiny, but it is not yet consistent. The best examples delve into the level of challenge, the impact of marking, quality of work and students' rates of progress. Where it is weaker, leaders tend to describe what is seen and compliance with school policies. There are times when all the information gained from various monitoring activities, such as observations of teaching, progress tracking and work scrutiny are not analysed in sufficient depth to provide teachers with incisive feedback on how to improve students' learning.

You have taken part in an external review of governance. The resulting report focuses on the most important priorities for the school and provides good advice for next steps and actions to improve governance. Governors have a good range of expertise and are knowledgeable about the performance of different groups of students. There is a renewed sense of urgency and governors are acting on advice with energy and enthusiasm.

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**

The school is drawing on external support effectively. Leaders are outward looking and have forged productive links with a number of schools, supporting the sharing of good practice. The local authority is providing more intensive support through a strategic improvement meeting group and effective support from advisers. The diocese also provides helpful advisory support and has supported the school to foster links with an outstanding school further afield.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, The Director of Education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lancaster and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**