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29 June 2015

Mr Ian Walker  
St Gerard's RC Primary School  
Avalon Court  
Hemlington  
Middlesbrough  
North Yorkshire  
TS8 9HU

Dear Mr Walker

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gerard's RC Primary School, Middlesbrough**

Following my visit to your school on 26 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 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:

- Strengthen senior leaders and subject leaders checks on the work taking place in classrooms to ensure that gaps in the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have disabilities and special educational needs, close rapidly.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils and the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. In addition, telephone discussions were held with a representative of the local authority and the Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough. A meeting was also held with a senior leader of education who is providing support to the school. The school

action plan was evaluated and other documents such as the outcomes of monitoring activities and school data were scrutinised.

## **Main findings**

The programme of support for senior leaders and teachers has strengthened and the focus is aligned firmly on the school's areas for improvement. The leadership team are responding to clearer responsibilities, better communication and greater direction from the headteacher. Specific and time limited school action plans are closely focused on the impact that work is expected to have on staff and pupils. Reviews of the school's work, much of which is currently provided by those supporting the school, make the next steps clear to governors and staff. Leaders have a better understanding of data and are analysing information more thoroughly. As a result pupils who are making slow progress are identified earlier and are receiving additional support. Checks on the impact that the additional support in reading and writing are having is not focused carefully enough yet to identify whether this work is enabling pupils to make the small steps needed to catch-up.

Leaders and governors have begun to work together purposefully to raise the expectations of all staff and pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants are drawing effectively on regular training to improve the teaching of reading and especially pupils' understanding of letters and sounds. The teaching of daily reading skills is enabling pupils in Year 1 and 2 to extend their vocabulary and understanding more securely. The number of pupils reaching the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check, (the letters and the sounds they represent), has increased significantly since last year. A swifter start to lessons and sharper focus in teachers' planning of lessons is starting to bring improvements in pupils' learning throughout the school. Pupils say lessons are more enjoyable. Pupils are finding teachers' clearer explanations and use of examples of good writing helpful in developing their writing and they are learning strategies to support them in tackling more complex calculations and word problems in mathematics. This is starting to have a positive impact: most pupils are making faster progress this term in response to improvements in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, however this has yet to be sustained over time.

Governors are receiving more detailed information about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. The outcomes of assessment are reported clearly and the additional support provided by the local authority, and teachers' work with other schools, has provided greater security to teachers' assessment. Governors have a clearer understanding of achievement across the school and are acting upon this information to make informed and strategic decisions with the headteacher. Recent decisions to refocus the work of a senior leader, to provide a greater oversight of the achievement and progress of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have disabilities and special educational needs, is in direct response to the picture emerging from school data. Governors are determined that the gaps in the progress that these

groups of pupils make compared to other pupils in school must close. Plans for the school to join a multi-academy trust are currently being considered by governors.

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**

Extensive and effective local authority support, including that brokered from a specialist leader in education, has ensured that leaders and teachers are fully aware of how their work needed to improve. The programme of support is deftly co-ordinated and responsive to individual needs. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants are stepping up to the challenge this provides. This work is beginning to develop and consolidate teachers' skills and they are implementing ideas and examples from the good practice seen in other schools. It is leading to more interesting lessons and pupils' progress is accelerating. The challenge for school leaders is to continue to consolidate and build on these gains as the intensive support reduces.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Catholic Diocese for Middlesbrough and the Director of Children's Services for Middlesbrough local authority.

Yours sincerely

Gina White

**Her Majesty's Inspector**