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Mr Michael Parker  
Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School  
Lynwood Road  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mr Parker

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2017, 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 April 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2016, 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching and learning in key stages 1 and 2, so that pupils make good progress in all year groups
- ensure that the school's self-evaluation is more succinct and sharply focused on the school's key strengths and improvement priorities.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, the chair and three other members of the governing body and representatives from both the local authority and the diocese. I also met with a group of pupils. You accompanied me on a learning walk, and I looked at work in pupils' books jointly with the subject leader for English. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. You also made available the findings of the review of governance and the review of the use of the pupil premium funding, both of which were carried out in response to your most recent inspection.

## **Context**

You took up your post in January 2016, shortly before the school's most recent inspection. Since then, there have been further changes in staffing which have brought greater stability to the make-up of the staff team, following a period of some uncertainty. A new extension to the school building has also been built, creating a new entrance and a room that is used both as the school library and as a base for adult-learning activities.

## **Main findings**

It is clear that you are providing both the stability and the strategic leadership that the school has needed and as a result, it is now on the road to recovery. You have quickly developed an effective leadership team who share your ambitions for the school, and the whole-school community are supportive of the improvement work that you have started.

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and your plans to tackle these, are thorough and exhaustive. You have correctly identified a number of priorities for the school that will improve the education provided for pupils at Sacred Heart. We talked about how making your self-evaluation more concise and sharply focused would ensure that it was an even more effective basis for subsequent improvement planning.

One key action that you have taken is to introduce a detailed system to track pupils' attainment and progress across the school. This is already having a positive impact on pupils' learning. This tracking ensures that teachers have the information that they need to plan learning that better meets pupils' individual needs, and allows leaders to put extra support in place where pupils may be falling behind.

Your actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school are also having a positive impact overall. In the books that I looked at, and in lessons that we saw, it is clear that most teachers are challenging pupils to think for themselves, for example in order to solve problems in mathematics. This is leading to an increasing number of pupils in key stage 2 tackling work above the level

expected for their age. Evidence in pupils' books and the school's tracking data show that progress is accelerating in most year groups, and that this improvement is not confined to mathematics. However, not all teachers as yet consistently share your high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and so the appropriate level of challenge seen in some books is less frequently seen in others.

Teachers have been well supported by leaders responsible for different subjects, and you have ensured that staff and leaders have all been able to benefit from a range of professional development opportunities both in school and externally. Teachers display secure subject knowledge, and they are well supported by a dedicated and able team of teaching assistants.

Results in the 2016 assessments showed clearly that the school is moving forward quickly in some areas, but that there is still more to be done in others. In the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development rose significantly, although it was still some way short of the national average. Indicators are that there will be a further improvement this year. Progress in pupils' phonics skills is gaining pace, and we saw some highly engaging phonics sessions in which pupils were enthusiastically practising and developing their phonic skills and knowledge.

There were similar positive signs of improvements in pupils' achievement in key stage 1, including for the most able pupils. However, you are realistic about likely results in this year's key stage 1 assessments and know that attainment is unlikely to match that of last year because of the low starting points of this cohort. Your tracking shows, though, that pupils are typically progressing well from their individual starting points.

The results in reading in key stage 2 were a disappointment as pupils' attainment and progress were both well below the national average. This was particularly disappointing as there was a clear improvement in pupils' achievement in writing. Leaders responded positively to this setback by increasing their efforts to improve pupils' reading. One way this is being done is through trying to involve parents more, through 'reading talk' activities to be shared by parents and their children at home, and adult-literacy classes run in school. These initiatives are in their infancy but signs of success can already be seen.

Last year's results also showed the level of the challenge facing leaders as they try to ensure that the most able pupils in key stage 2 reach the high levels of which they are capable. You agree that the key to achieving this aim is to eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching in key stages 1 and 2, and to ensure that all teachers have appropriately high expectations of what pupils can achieve.

The previous inspection recommended that external reviews of governance and of the use of pupil premium funding should be carried out. Both of these have taken

place, and it is evident that they have both had a positive impact. Governors are able to clearly articulate their role in holding school leaders to account, and changes to the structure of governing body committees have ensured that they have plenty of opportunities to do this. Individual governors' skills and expertise are now also being more effectively used and as a consequence, the governors themselves are able to recognise their own increased effectiveness. This view is supported by the local authority and diocese. The impact of the review of pupil premium funding can be seen in leaders' detailed analysis of past and future pupil premium spending and the care with which disadvantaged pupils' progress is now monitored. This increased awareness is leading to improved outcomes for these pupils, as could be seen in last year's key stage 1 results.

### **External support**

Since the inspection in April 2016, the school has received good-quality support from both the local authority and the diocese. School leaders have benefited from specific leadership support and training, while staff have been able to access training opportunities within the local cluster of schools and more widely. The local authority and the diocese know the school well and are confident that the leadership, including governance, that is needed to move the school rapidly forward is now securely in place.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Blackburn with Darwen. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**