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Mr Phil Sharp
Headteacher
St Clare's Catholic Primary School
Hawthorn Road
Lache
Chester
Cheshire
CH4 8HX

Dear Mr Sharp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Clare's Catholic Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 September 2013. 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 action plan so that it gives greater prominence to outcomes for pupils; in this way leaders and managers should be in a stronger position to quantify and evaluate the precise impact of actions they have taken to improve the school to good.
- make sure that planned changes to leadership of the school are implemented swiftly so that they do not derail the progress already made.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, teachers, students and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I took the opportunity to tour the school to observe learning and looked at pupils' work. I read minutes of Governing Body meetings and records of visits made by a local authority representative and a National Leader of Education.

Context

There have been no contextual changes since the last inspection. However, the current headteacher is due to leave his post at the end of December 2013. Governors have made plans to appoint a temporary headteacher until the position is filled on a permanent basis. Governors, the diocese and the local authority are fully aware of the potential destabilising effect this may have on the school.

Main findings

It is clear that improving pupils' achievement through raising the quality of teaching is your main priority. However, a theme running through all your improvement work is the raising of expectations and a 'yes we can' attitude. For example you have made a quick win by improving the attendance of pupils. Letters to all parents, detailing the importance of attendance in terms of their child's progress, meetings with some parents and good links with the Educational Welfare Officer have resulted in attendance levels improving to above 96% this term.

Since the last inspection senior leaders have increased the frequency of their monitoring of teaching and learning. Lesson observations and checks made on pupils' work by senior leaders have been followed up by feedback to teachers on how they can improve their teaching and therefore the progress being made by pupils. As a result there has been an improvement in the quality of marking of pupils' work. Pupils are now given time at the start of lessons to respond to the teachers' comments, consequently the rate at which pupils are progressing is beginning to increase.

The marking policy has been reviewed and teachers are already implementing the actions effectively. Through their marking, teachers take the opportunity to explain to pupils what they need to do to improve. This has enabled pupils to become more involved in their own learning, as they now systematically correct their errors or respond to additional questions posed by teachers to extend their thinking. I saw pupils responding enthusiastically, at the beginning of the day, to their teacher's comments in their mathematics books about work they had completed the previous day. Older pupils agreed that this approach helps them improve because they are focused on what they need to do better. In one example pupils had completed work

on a bar chart. When marking their work the teacher had posed additional questions on probability. By asking the pupils to take information from one source, in this case a bar graph, and use it to answer a additional questions teachers are speeding up the rate at which pupils are progressing

Teachers have benefitted from additional training on how to accurately assess the progress pupils make. Teachers ensure that the tasks they set in lessons are closely matched to pupils' individual capabilities and potential. As a result the individual targets set for pupils are being used to boost writing skills in other subjects. For example, pupils in a religious education lesson about David and Goliath were asked to write letters from the point of view of a character in the story. This not only enhanced the pupils' understanding of the story but also developed their skills in writing independently.

An action plan has been drawn up to address the main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Actions to be taken are well thought out and provide a measured approach to moving the school to good. However, in order to monitor the effectiveness of the plan, leaders must identify clearly how actions are expected to benefit pupils in terms of improvements in their learning.

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

You are making effective use of external support to help St Clare's become a good school at the next inspection. The local authority has a good grasp of the strengths of the school and the challenges you are facing. By providing confirmation of leaders lesson observation judgements the local authority is helping you to improve the quality of teaching quickly. Support provided by the local authority for both the literacy and numeracy coordinators has been used to develop an area action plan and identify future training needs. The link you have made with a National Leader of Education and her outstanding school has already proved to be extremely useful. Support has been given with the writing of a Mathematics action plan along with the monitoring of teacher's planning and their marking. As a result teachers are embracing the need to challenge all pupils' to do their best. Links have also been made with another local outstanding school. Plans have been made for teachers to observe good and outstanding practice but it is too early to judge the impact of this partnership.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester and as below.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector