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Mr Tim Alderman  
St Julie's Catholic High School  
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Dear Mr Alderman

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Julie's Catholic High School**

Following my visit to your school on 23 March 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 March 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- include milestones and tighter timescales within the school's action plan
- develop the oracy skills of pupils
- remedy the issues identified in science.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors, a group of middle leaders, teachers and teaching assistants, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

The school action plan and anonymised performance management documents were evaluated. Learning walks were undertaken with senior leaders and discussions were held with pupils. The school's own assessment information was also considered.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection the leadership team has been restructured and an extended leadership team has been established. A new head of science is in post and there have been changes to teaching staff in science, modern foreign languages, English, mathematics, religious education and history. A review of support staff has been undertaken and new appointments were made.

## **Main findings**

Although the school community was disappointed by the findings of the last inspection, you rallied your team and staff to accept the judgements and use it as an opportunity to reflect and respond. You did this with alacrity. Your current evaluation of where you are in your journey towards good is refreshingly honest.

You were asked to improve the performance management of teachers by ensuring that targets set are measurable and precise and hold teachers to account more robustly for pupils' progress. The system you introduced in September has responded to this recommendation fully. All targets are now aligned to the teachers' standards and the school improvement plan. The teachers and leaders I spoke to all commented that they feel 'held to account' for the progress that pupils make in their classes. They value the clarity of the system and understand that their own practice contributes to the success of the school. Although you are only part way through the first year of this process, the procedures to manage the performance of staff are unambiguous. You have already begun the process of introducing performance management for support staff and they value the opportunities to improve their own practice and be part of the school's drive for improvements.

The last inspection identified that action plans were lacking in precision, sharpness and focus on measurable success criteria. In response you have produced a single action plan that is strategic and has clear priorities, suitably supported by well-chosen actions to bring about success. However, the timescales you have assigned are vague and open-ended. You acknowledge that the pace of change needs to be quicker and that tighter timescales would bring more focused attention to specific actions. We also discussed how identifying milestones would aid governors in their role of holding you and other leaders to account.

It was clear from my discussions with governors, leaders and teachers that the actions since the last inspection have not been mere refinements or the simple implementation of new systems. The school is undergoing a shift in culture and

there is a sense of exhilaration among staff to 'get the school to good'. Leaders have become more strategic in their roles and there is a growing sense of all staff having a part to play in school improvement. As you commented to me, your mantra is: 'If you are not helping to move the school forward, you're holding us back.' You and your governors have been prepared to take difficult decisions and are resolute that you will continue to do so.

The final area for improvement was to improve the quality of teaching and progress made by pupils. Your actions so far have been appropriate and are bringing about the necessary changes. The most able pupils are now set work that challenges them and the expectations teachers have of them are high. The examination results in 2016 indicated that the progress they make is still slower than their peers nationally. Nevertheless, the needs of the most able pupils are being more closely met, although we agreed that there is still some way to go until these pupils achieve as well as they should.

Developing teachers' questioning skills has been a focus for teachers this year and I saw some examples of very effective questioning as we carried out our learning walk. Questions are being asked which require pupils to think more and this is helping to deepen their understanding. The manner in which the pupils responded to these questions was variable and, at times, the oral skills of the pupils was weak.

Much of your work has been to ensure greater consistency of good teaching. The last inspection noted that there was too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. With your leadership team, you have laid down basic expectations and the characteristics of good teaching. You have been sensitive so as not to stifle the creativity and flair of your very best teachers, but to use them as role models of good practice to others. You also told me of how there is now one common marking policy, which you expect all teachers to adhere to. This is checked through the routine quality assurance processes that have been established. The pupils I spoke to have certainly noticed the difference. As one of them commented to me, 'There's only one system now, not ten!'

Subjects that were underperforming at the time of the last inspection saw improved outcomes in 2016. This was especially the case for mathematics, modern foreign languages and humanities, which are closer to the national average and show a marked improvement. This is not so for science, and there are still significant issues of which you are aware of and are dealing with. Governors, who were identified as a strength of the school in the previous inspection, once again showed their perspicacity. While challenging you on the issues in science, they noted that underperformance is not solely because of curriculum issues but also the quality of teaching. You accept this and are working hard to strengthen the capacity in leadership and teaching in this department. Improvements can be seen but they need to be much quicker so as to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should in science.

## **External support**

The school has received support from the local authority and from the teaching school alliance to which the school belongs. Support has also been brokered by the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Leaders and teachers have been proactive in working with other schools and are keen to develop this further. The external support received has been effective and is helping the school to move forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**