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Mr Tony M^cGuinness
Principal
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Dear Mr M^cGuinness

Special measures monitoring inspection of All Saints Catholic High School

Following my visit with Neil Fazackerley, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Annette Patterson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that, at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

As a result of our discussions, the school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection on condition that you guarantee that they will have opportunities to observe good and outstanding professional practice and will receive high-quality support. At this time, there is no restriction on the number of newly qualified teachers that you can appoint or the subject departments that they can be appointed to. This decision will be reviewed at the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of People Services for Knowsley and the Director of Education for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2014.

- Improve the achievement of all students, including those in the sixth form, so that it is at least good, by ensuring teachers:
 - improve the accuracy with which they assess the progress that all students make and that they analyse this information and use it to better inform their lesson planning
 - identify gaps in students' understanding more quickly and take decisive action to fill any gaps
 - raise their expectations of what their students can achieve and make sure they are given work that is more appropriately challenging so students are required to think more deeply, evaluate, and explain in more detail
 - develop opportunities for all students to build their confidence in speaking and writing at length, particularly in Key Stage 3, using the specific vocabulary of the different subjects they study
 - help students to improve their numeracy and literacy skills in all subjects
 - set high-quality homework frequently, in line with the best practice seen in the school
 - give opportunities to students to respond to feedback they receive, to ensure they understand what they need to do to improve and, over time, to apply what they have learned.

- Improve students' attitudes to their learning by ensuring they:
 - attend more regularly, particularly those who are disadvantaged and those in the sixth form
 - catch up on any work missed as a result of their absence
 - take more pride in their work
 - do not get involved in causing low-level disruption.

- Improve urgently the impact of leadership at all levels, including governance, by:
 - improving the rigour with which all teachers and leaders, particularly subject leaders, are held to account for the progress of students
 - developing the skills teachers, leaders and governors use to analyse the data they collect, in order to better use it to identify areas for improvement and inform their planning
 - strengthening further the communication and hence partnership working between the school and parents.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and made visits to lessons to observe the teachers' classroom practice and its impact on pupils' progress. Several of these visits were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents, including leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing and reports prepared by the local authority on the school's progress in response to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Inspectors scrutinised the minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's most up-to-date information on pupils' attainment and progress and the work in samples of pupils' books.

Inspectors met with the Principal and other members of the senior leadership team, those heads of department with responsibility for the English Baccalaureate subjects and a group of subject teachers. An inspector held telephone discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils, a group of sixth form learners and a parent.

One inspector analysed the school's attendance and behaviour logs and the record of the checks made on the suitability of adults to work with children.

There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to consider them as part of this inspection.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the interim principal has left the school. The new staffing structure, agreed with the governing body prior to the summer break, has been implemented. Twenty-one members of staff have left and one teacher joined the school in September.

During this visit, inspectors collected and evaluated evidence to determine the school's progress against each of the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report of December 2014.

Outcomes for pupils

Senior leaders' projections that headline results at Key Stage 4 would improve in 2015 were realised. The proportion of pupils leaving All Saints with five or more higher grade GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, increased by seven percentage points compared to the previous year. This improvement meant that the school met the government's floor standards for 2014, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

In 2015, pupils' attainment at GCSE grades A* to C in the large majority of subjects was broadly in line with the 2014 national averages. This was an improvement on the previous year's performance. However, attainment in English language, English literature and mathematics remained below average. Although pupils' progress in English language and mathematics increased in 2015, compared to the previous year, both progress measures remained below national averages. Pupils from almost all starting points made slower progress than their peers nationally.

In English and mathematics, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils across the country grew wider in 2015. Disadvantaged pupils left All Saints over one-and-a-half GCSE grades behind their peers in English and two grades behind in mathematics. This indicates that the additional funding that the school received through the pupil premium had little impact on improving outcomes for this group of pupils in these two subjects. However, the achievement of pupils in modern languages and the humanities was much more positive, with all groups of pupils making progress in line with their peers nationally. Moreover, in humanities subjects, the gap in progress between disadvantaged pupils in the school and their peers across the country closed. The Principal and his colleagues are acutely aware of the need to continue to close the gaps in attainment and progress between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, particularly in the core subjects. Accordingly, they have taken steps to review how pupil premium funding is directed to address the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils. At this early stage, leaders are reporting improvements in the progress that disadvantaged pupils are currently making in English and mathematics. While better use of the funding is slowly reversing the decline in GCSE examination performance, the full impact of this work has yet to be realised. In current Year 11, for example, the school's assessment information is showing little improvement in pupils' attainment and progress compared to last year. However, for pupils in Year 10, assessment information is much more promising, with senior leaders reporting improvements in attainment and progress and gaps in performance closing.

The most recent information available about attainment and progress in the sixth form indicates that learners on vocational pathways make above average progress from their starting points. This is not the case for learners following Advanced level courses who make slower progress than average. Consequently, the governing body has agreed that the sixth form will continue to offer predominantly vocational programmes, with learners wishing to take academic courses being directed to other local providers.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders are taking effective steps to improve the quality of teachers' professional practice. Evidence from the school's self-evaluation and the most recent reports from the local authority show that teaching has improved throughout the school since the inspection. However, as was the case at the previous monitoring

inspection, the quality of classroom practice is inconsistent, both within and between subject departments. As a result, pupils do not make good progress.

In much of the less effective practice, teachers do not take enough account of what their pupils already know, understand and can do. Consequently, some activities are too easy for the most-able pupils and too hard for weaker pupils, which slows the learning of both groups. Teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of subject-specific terminology or the correct use of English. As a result, pupils are not always able to express themselves convincingly, either orally or in writing.

In some lessons, however, teachers plan lessons carefully and are clear about what they want their pupils to learn. Activities are carefully sequenced to enable pupils to build their understanding and skills. These activities enable pupils to make links between their new learning and what they have been taught in the past and, as a consequence, deepen their grasp of the key ideas. In these lessons, teachers use questioning skilfully to probe pupils' understanding and make them think hard about what they are learning. Inspectors observed teachers employing these techniques in some English, mathematics and physical education lessons.

Leaders have recently introduced initiatives to raise the profile of reading in the school. These initiatives include the daily 'drop everything and read' (DEAR) scheme, ambassadors from a prominent local employer working alongside pupils in Key Stage 3 to improve their understanding and use of English, and sixth-form learners acting as reading buddies for younger pupils. Although it is too early to measure the impact of these strategies on pupils' literacy, this greater emphasis on reading has led to an increase in the numbers of pupils borrowing books from the school library.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and their marking follows the school's policy. Most teachers provide pupils with helpful comments and encourage them to act upon these.

Senior leaders have recently introduced an online facility for pupils to do homework and, if appropriate, submit it to their teachers by email. This new strategy has not yet been monitored carefully to check its effectiveness in accelerating pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour policy has been recently reviewed by the school's leaders. It is thorough, detailed and provides strategies for staff to use in maintaining good order in the classroom and around the school. Furthermore, there is much greater emphasis on rewards than sanctions. Consequently, relationships between pupils and their teachers are generally warm and friendly and the atmosphere around the school is orderly and usually purposeful. Pupils are well supervised at breaktimes and as they move around the school between lessons. This contributes effectively to pupils' safety and their punctuality to lessons.

Pupils and staff told inspectors that behaviour around the school is much improved since the appointment of the Principal and the implementation of the new policy. However, senior leaders do not analyse the data they collect on behaviour well enough to enable them to determine which aspects of the policy are working effectively and which are not. They do not identify those groups of pupils who need additional support to help modify their behaviour, so that they can gain maximum benefit from coming to school.

Where teaching captures pupils' interests and teachers make clear what the purpose of the learning is, pupils respond positively and fully engage with the activities that they are given. In these circumstances, they make rapid progress. However, where teaching is weaker, pupils tend to switch off and make slow progress. Nevertheless, in all lessons visited by inspectors, pupils' behaviour was managed well by their teachers, with little learning time lost due to disruptive behaviour.

The school site is clean, tidy and free from litter and graffiti. This provides compelling evidence of pupils' respect and care for their environment. Most pupils wear their uniform smartly, although a few pupils test the boundaries of what is acceptable.

As was the case at the previous visit, attendance and persistent absence are still causes for concern. The school reports a marginal improvement in attendance since the start of the autumn term, compared to a similar period last year, but it is still over two percentage points below the national average for all schools. This is largely due to the weak attendance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly in Years 9 and 11, where the gap between this group's attendance and that of their peers is wider than it was last year. Nevertheless, the equivalent gap in Years 7, 8 and 10 is closing.

There has been an improvement in the numbers of pupils who have achieved 100% attendance since the start of the academic year. Persistent absence, however, remains stubbornly too high, with 120 pupils currently attending for 85% of the time or less, a slight increase on the same figure from last year.

Although strategies introduced by senior leaders at the start of the autumn term to improve attendance are meeting with some success, leaders are aware that weak attendance is a significant barrier to improving pupils' outcomes and that the work done with pupils and their parents to improve attendance has not yet had the desired impact.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal has brought a strong drive and determination to improve the school. Staff and governors are united behind his vision for All Saints. He has implemented the staffing structure that was set out at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. As a result, all staff are clear about their professional responsibilities, and

lines of accountability have been clarified. There is a common sense of purpose to their work and staff morale has improved greatly since the Principal took over leadership of the school. A substantial reduction in sickness absence has led to much greater consistency of subject staffing and fewer temporary teachers taking classes.

Senior leaders now check the quality of teaching and learning with greater rigour and the new approaches introduced at the time of the previous visit are now firmly established practice. As a result, they regularly evaluate the quality of teachers' work and its impact on pupils' outcomes and use this information to hold teachers to account. This strategy enables leaders and managers to recognise strengths in teachers' professional performance and aspects that need to be improved. Those teachers who spoke with inspectors said that they found the monitoring of their performance in this way supportive and central to identifying their professional development needs.

To assure the reliability of teachers' assessment of pupils' performance, subject leaders are now using evidence they collect from observations of teaching and scrutiny of work in pupils' books. A number of subject leaders are also using the expertise of specialists to confirm their evaluation of this aspect of their colleagues' work. This is leading to leaders and managers having much greater confidence in the data they collect about pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment information is collected every half-term. The resulting data are analysed by senior leaders to determine the effectiveness of teachers' work and the impact of leaders' strategies to improve the school. However, this analysis is not sharp enough. It emphasises the performance of disadvantaged pupils in comparison with that of their peers in the school, but an analysis of the achievement of other groups, for example girls and boys, is not routinely carried out. Consequently, the governing body and staff with leadership responsibilities do not always have a detailed enough picture of how well all pupils are doing. This means that they are not fully able to plan the actions needed to improve the school.

In response to the review of pupil premium spending, recommended at the previous inspection, all teachers now have specific performance management targets related to the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils in their classes. Senior leaders have taken the decision to direct some of this additional funding into providing extra help for disadvantaged pupils in Year 11, aiming to close the performance gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers nationwide. Leaders report that, as a result of this strategy, disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress in mathematics, but its impact in English is less marked.

The governing body continues to provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge to staff at all levels in their quest to improve the school. Governors understand the challenges that the school faces on its journey out of special measures and, as a result, are able to hold senior leaders to account for the progress being made against each of the priorities in the school development plan. However, they are under no illusions that more work needs to be done. Governors

recognise the need to check the impact of the initiatives introduced to improve the school so that they can ensure that staff time is used effectively to raise standards.

The actions resulting from the curriculum review, carried out prior to the previous monitoring visit, have been implemented in full. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 now have more time for English and mathematics. However, it is too early to assess the long-term impact of this change on pupils' progress.

External support

The school continues to receive effective support from officers of the local authority and the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The Archdiocese is represented on the executive monitoring board (EMB). The EMB is a committee of the governing body charged with monitoring the progress that the school is making against each of the priorities in the development plan. In addition, they check that change is happening at a fast enough pace.

Officers from the local authority are keeping a close eye on the school's progress. They provide an external source of information to leaders, managers and governors about the impact of the work being done to improve the school. This ensures that the foundation on which the governing body can hold leaders to account is secure.

Links with specialist subject staff from successful local schools, in place at the previous monitoring visit, have been maintained. These links continue to boost the capacity of subject leadership at the school.

Since the previous visit, the school has employed the services of a consultant to lead an outstanding teacher programme with a small group of teachers. Although this is a relatively recent initiative, senior leaders report that it is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Their long-term intention is to involve all teachers in this training.