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26 June 2015

Mr Tony McGuinness
Principal
All Saints Catholic High School
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Northwood
Knowsley
Merseyside
L33 8XF

Dear Mr McGuinness

Special measures monitoring inspection of All Saints Catholic High School

Following my visit with Marcia Harding and Paul Edmondson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 June 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Following our discussions the school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection on condition that you guarantee they will have opportunities to observe good to 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 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 which 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 second monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 June 2015

Evidence

Separate meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, the Principal and consultant Principal, senior leaders responsible for Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form and representatives from the local authority and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. Meetings were held with a group of subject teachers, the middle leaders with responsibility for the suite of subjects that comprise the English Baccalaureate, two heads of year and groups of students of different ages. Inspectors observed teaching in a range of subjects and by different teachers; seven lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised the work in samples of students' books and one inspector attended a school assembly.

Inspectors examined a number of school documents, including the school development plan, reports written by the specialist leaders of education currently working in the school, the 'deep-dive' reports which provide an evaluation of how well each subject department is doing, the minutes of senior leaders' regular meetings with subject leaders and the school's up-to-date attainment and progress data. Inspectors also evaluated the school's new behaviour policy and the recently agreed staffing structure, due to be implemented at the start of the autumn term.

One inspector examined the school's behaviour and attendance records and the record of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children and young people.

Inspectors were unable to consider the views of students and parents as there were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Context

Since my previous monitoring inspection, the interim Principal has handed over responsibility for running the school to the new Principal, who joined the staff at the start of the summer term. The interim Principal, who has remained at the school to boost leadership capacity, will be leaving her post at the end of the summer term. Soon after taking his post, the Principal evaluated the way staff are deployed at the school and, as a result, has agreed a new staffing structure with the school's governing body. This will be implemented at the start of the autumn term. A working party of staff have reviewed the school's behaviour policy. This has been approved for implementation by the school's governors. At this inspection, inspectors focused inspection activities mainly on evaluating the school's progress out of special measures in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's Key Stage 4 examination data show that the school did not reach the government's minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress at GCSE

in 2014. Furthermore, students of middle ability and the most able made significantly below expected progress in English and mathematics. Senior leaders' ability to anticipate this degree of underperformance was stymied by the unreliability of teacher assessment data which, prior to the final examinations, painted a much more positive picture of the predicted outcomes than was actually delivered in the final examinations. Senior leaders have taken decisive steps to address this shortcoming in teachers' practice. They have introduced a much sharper focus on securing the reliability of teachers' assessment of students' performance at Key Stage 4. Using the expertise of specialist leaders of education from a number of successful secondary schools, teachers have received training in assessing students' work and making accurate judgements as to its quality. This, coupled with a more robust approach to setting students' targets and rigorous monitoring of students' progress, is giving senior leaders and governors much greater confidence in the data. It is also enabling senior leaders to target extra help at those students who they identify as underperforming and to hold teachers to account for students' outcomes. As a result of these strategies, the school anticipates an eight percentage point increase in the proportion of Year 11 students attaining five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, when compared to 2014. Furthermore, the school data are indicating a nine percentage point increase in the proportion of students making the progress expected of them in English and a five percentage point increase in mathematics, compared to last year. These performance indicators are encouraging and, should these results be achieved this year, the school will meet the government's minimum expectations for attainment at GCSE. However, expected progress in English and mathematics still remains well below 2014 national averages. In addition, the school's analysis of the data by student groups shows that the attainment gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers have grown.

At Key Stage 3, as at Key Stage 4, systems for collecting and analysing information on students' academic performance are well developed and provide senior leaders with a readily accessible source of information. However, the reliability of these data has not been subject to the same checks as those at Key Stage 4. Consequently, judgements on students' attainment and progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 are not secure.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is not yet consistently of high enough quality to have a sufficient impact on students' progress. However, where learning is at least good, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They plan lessons that structure the learning carefully so that ideas are developed sequentially and in order of increasing complexity to help students deepen their understanding. Teachers use a range of questioning techniques to challenge students and make them think hard about what they are learning. Teachers also use questioning skilfully to gauge students' understanding. In lessons where teachers plan activities that meet the needs of the different groups in the class, students are engaged, on task and use their time well. This results in

them making progress at least in line with their teachers' learning intentions. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have high expectations of what the students they teach can achieve. Teachers' marking and feedback are diagnostic and give students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, which they then act on. However, not all teaching is yet of this standard. In too many lessons teachers do not plan for progression, so that the foundations on which students build their knowledge and understanding of the 'big ideas' are not secure. Where teaching is less effective, teachers' lesson-planning does not take enough account of the different groups of students in the class. Consequently, a one-size-fits-all approach is adopted, meaning that many activities are either too hard for weaker students or, as is often the case, too easy for those of middle ability and the more able, slowing their progress. As was the case at the previous inspection, there are still examples of teachers' marking that is not having sufficient impact on students' progress.

Beyond English and mathematics, there is little evidence of the contribution that other subjects make to developing students' literacy and numeracy. Consequently, opportunities for students to build their confidence in speaking and writing at length are not being maximised.

Although inspectors observed little disruptive behaviour in lessons, where teaching was less than engaging students were compliant and followed instructions; the students showed little interest in what they had been given to do and, as a result, made slow progress.

Inspectors observed effective deployment of teaching assistants in lessons where they actively focused on maximising the learning of those students they were supporting.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As was the case at the previous inspection, the conduct of students around the school is generally good. They are considerate towards each other and the adults who work with them. Students are supervised well during breaks and at lesson changeover, minimising risks to students' safety and improving their punctuality to lessons.

Rates of attendance and persistent absence are still a cause for concern. Although attendance has improved slightly when compared to last year, at 91.2% it remains well below the 2014 national average. Similarly, although the school reports a two percentage point reduction in the proportion of students who are persistently absent, when compared to last year, persistent absence is still too high.

Currently, students' attendance is not routinely analysed by student groups; consequently, it is difficult for senior leaders to target resources where they will have

the greatest and most rapid impact on this aspect of school performance. However, senior leaders are aware of this and from September a new team will be in place, charged with the task of improving students' attendance and ensuring, as far as possible, that students who are absent from school are safe.

Following a new approach to managing behaviour, adopted at the start of the spring term, the number of students who received at least one fixed-term exclusion rose in comparison with last year. This was as a direct result of senior leaders' higher expectations for students' conduct. As this new approach has become established, students' behaviour has improved and the number of students excluded from the school is now in decline. Staff who spoke with inspectors said how much they valued their input into the development of the behaviour policy. They expressed the opinion that their involvement in devising the policy is leading to its consistent application by all staff and resulting improvements in behaviour. The latter sentiment was echoed by the students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Although in post for a relatively short period only, the Principal has articulated a clear vision and is giving direction to the work of the staff in their drive to improve the school. In establishing his office in the heart of the building he is a visible presence, making himself readily accessible to all members of the school community.

Soon after his appointment, the Principal, ably supported by the consultant Principal, reviewed the school's staffing structure. This has been approved by the governing body for implementation in September. This review has clarified the roles and responsibilities for each member of staff and will enable senior leaders and governors to hold staff increasingly to account for the quality of their work and its impact on students' outcomes.

Senior leaders have adopted a consistent approach to monitoring the work of subject departments. Each subject department is linked to a member of the senior leadership team. Regular link meetings, which focus on the standard of teaching and students' outcomes, are enabling senior leaders to hold heads of department to account for the quality of the work in their areas of responsibility.

Teachers new to the school, who were interviewed by inspectors, said that they are supported well by their colleagues. They value the opportunities to observe good to outstanding practice in the partner schools currently supporting All Saints and have received effective training to broaden their professional practice. Taken together, these approaches have helped develop their skills as teachers.

Senior leaders have a detailed development plan in place to address the key priorities for improvement identified at the previous inspection and all staff are working hard to address them. However, senior leaders' monitoring of the plan

places too much emphasis on actions taken and not enough on their impact. Consequently, it is not clear whether the progress being made against each of the improvement priorities is as rapid as it could be.

The new governing body is aware of the hard work that is being undertaken by the staff to improve the school and a sub-group of governors, the executive monitoring board (EMB), is monitoring the implementation of the development plan closely. However, governors are realistic and under no illusions that much more needs to be done if the school is to be at least good at its next inspection.

Each subject department has undergone a review led by the local authority consultant; the review team collected evidence on the quality of teaching, students' behaviour, management of the curriculum and data on students' performance. Each review has led to the production of a written report, which highlights the department's strengths and what needs to be done to bring about improvement. This objective view has provided middle leaders with clear and precise information on which to formulate a plan of action to tackle the recommendations. However, the time period for heads of department to produce their action plans is too generous. Moreover, some of the action plans are not sharp enough, with improvement activities that do not have clearly defined time scales. Consequently, this is making it difficult for senior leaders to maintain a brisk pace of change.

Senior leaders have carried out a review of the curriculum from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5, in order to strengthen provision and address underperformance. For example, from September all students will have more mathematics and English lessons, with the intention of accelerating their progress in these two subjects. The suite of vocational qualifications on offer in the sixth form is to be extended, building on students' success, over time, in these subjects.

External support

The local authority and the archdiocese are working effectively to support the school on its journey to good. The archdiocese is represented on the EMB and, as a consequence, directly involved in the strategic direction of the school. The archdiocese has brokered the support of a national leader of education from an outstanding Catholic high school in a neighbouring authority to support the new Principal in his drive to improve the school.

The local authority has linked All Saints with three local successful schools. Specialist leaders of education from these schools have been working with subject leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas and to develop their capacity to lead and manage improvements. However, a number of these links are relatively new and it is too early to assess their impact.