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Mr P Gardiner
Principal
Thomas Becket Catholic School
Becket Way
Kettering Road North
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Dear Mr Gardiner

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Thomas Becket Catholic School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Michael Merva, additional inspector, on 18 October 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to the staff, students and the representatives of the governing body.

Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone some changes in staffing. Two teachers have left the school. The mathematics department continues to have difficulties in recruiting specialist staff.

As a result of the inspection on 26 May 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment has risen since the previous inspection but remains below the national average. In 2011, the proportion of students attaining five GCSE examination passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, increased by 7%. These students made better progress than those in the previous year, particularly in English. Unvalidated GCSE examinations results for 2011 indicate that these improved levels of attainment and rates of progress have been broadly maintained. In lessons seen by the inspectors, students are making faster progress because the quality of teaching and learning is improving steadily. In general, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject encourages students to engage with equally matched enthusiasm in the interesting work that is planned. Inspection evidence indicates

September 2010



that the proportion of lessons that are judged to be good or better is increasing gradually and that the trend of improving achievement is set to continue. This is because teachers are more sensitive to the needs and abilities of students in the class. Teachers use a range of questioning techniques to assess the progress that the students make during the lessons so that they can modify their teaching appropriately. Leaders recognise the importance of ensuring that the quality of the students' learning and progress is the prime factor used when arriving at a judgment about teaching.

In the best lessons, students are expected to take greater responsibility for their learning and are encouraged to be more independent. In English, for example, students were asked to research, discuss and present their findings on how key post-modern theories are presented through film. In another English lesson, students researched, rehearsed and re-enacted a court scene from a book they had been studying. The rest of the class used the GCSE assessment criteria to judge the performance on how well they engaged and entertained the audience, if they used appropriate movements and gestures and whether they communicated clearly, confidently and effectively. This helped them to consider how best to communicate complex processes to their peers. Students say that their leadership skills are fostered regularly in a number of subjects, particularly in physical education, for example, as sports leaders. There are fewer well planned opportunities for students to take on responsibility in some of the subjects. In some lessons, the pace of learning is slow and students become restless or sometimes passive. They are given too few opportunities to share their ideas with their peers. In these lessons, teachers still have a tendency to dominate by giving over lengthy explanations and instructions.

More and more teachers are beginning make better use of the information they have about their students in order to plan lessons. This enables them to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers are beginning to share grade descriptors with students and often provide exemplifications to enable them to work at different levels. In the best practice seen, teachers' improved awareness of individual progress meant that tasks were well adapted and precise oral feedback helped students to improve their work. In some lessons, resources are closely tailored to groups or individuals, such as those learning English as an additional language. However, whilst activities are generally interesting and imaginative, they sometimes lack explicit challenge for students of different abilities. Often, all students are given the same task to complete and the success criteria for learning are too general. Consequently, students are not always sufficiently clear about the skills or understanding they need to demonstrate if they are to achieve their ambitious personal targets.

Leadership capacity at all levels is improving steadily, particularly that of middle leaders. Self-evaluation is beginning to have an impact on improvement planning which, in turn, is helping staff to identify more precisely areas for improvement.



Close monitoring of teachers' work and lesson observations are also enabling leaders and managers to identify more precisely the strengths and areas for further development so that appropriate support and professional development can be built into the teachers' support programme. The governing body is better equipped to monitor the school's work. Senior leaders are involving staff more fully in whole-school improvement planning processes. The school development plan is being further developed to include more challenging performance indicators that are agreed with staff. Nevertheless, some targets are too loosely expressed and the current lack of baseline information and milestones in some subjects means that it is difficult for leaders to closely monitor progress towards their aspirational goals. There are more opportunities for staff to discuss and share good practice through regular meetings, for example between English and mathematics. Consequently, staff have a better understanding of what constitutes good and outstanding practice. The school is working with an independent provider and is planning to enlist the support of the School Improvement Partner to work with leaders at all levels to help raise overall attainment and achievement for all its students. Some initiatives are relatively new and will take time to embed before the full impact on outcomes can be seen.

Despite difficulties in recruitment, the school has appointed strong teachers in specialist subjects. This has led to increased confidence amongst students and in improving achievement in English and mathematics. Students say that the opportunities they have to take part in specialist challenges and competitions have helped to build their team working, leadership and communication skills. Students also indicated that they would like to contribute more to whole-school improvements by working with the leadership team, for example undertaking 'learning walks' and conducting lesson observations.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010.

- Raise students' attainment through further developing the quality of learning by ensuring that:
 - teaching is more sensitive to the range of abilities of students in the class and questioning is developed more to assess what progress is being made during lessons so that further teaching can be provided when require
 - students are provided with the skills and opportunities to develop as fully competent independent learners
 - the relationship between teaching quality and students' behaviour is fully recognised and the sharing of good practice by teachers leads to enhanced attitudes to learning on the part of students.

- Improve the impact of the self-evaluation and improvement planning process, by both middle and senior leaders, by ensuring that:
 - the areas for improvement are more precisely identified so that support and the monitoring of its effectiveness, are strongly focused
 - there is a more precise understanding of individual teachers' strengths and their areas for development so that more targeted support can be provided.