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Yvonne Lucey
Thomas Becket Catholic School
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Kettering Road North
Northampton
NN3 6HT

Dear Ms Lucey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thomas Becket Catholic School

Following my visit with Sherry Gladwin and Simon Hughes, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29–30 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection 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.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. 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.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers of English and physical education. Newly qualified teachers may also be appointed in mathematics, subject to prior agreement by Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire, the Diocese and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement improves by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently plan interesting activities and prepare resources that are closely matched to students' differing abilities and needs within their classes
 - training staff to enable them to prepare more suitable work for students who speak English as an additional language, disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - making sure teachers frequently evaluate the rate of progress being made by individual students during a lesson, moving them on with their learning quickly once they show understanding or providing support for those who need it, so that a good pace of learning is maintained, with no wasted time
 - eliminating low-level disruption and poor behaviour
 - ensuring that written marking is followed up with opportunities for students to respond to the advice on how to improve their work by attempting a new challenge or practising skills, to enable them to reach and exceed their targets
 - improving the consistency of teaching and achievement between subjects and in the sixth form.

- Improve leadership and management by building the capacity of subject leaders to enable them to address effectively inconsistencies in teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility and to drive improvement.

- Ensure that the range of subjects offered matches the needs and interests of all groups of students and enables them to achieve.

- Raise attendance by promoting the importance of good attendance to students and their parents and carers.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29–30 April 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other senior leaders and heads of subject areas, three groups of students, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the Diocesan Commissioner for Schools. A telephone conversation also took place with the Development Director of the David Ross Education Trust (DRET).

Context

Since the previous inspection, two Vice-Principals have left the school and a review of the current leadership structure of the school has taken place. There are plans to recruit a senior member of staff with responsibility for school standards. The subject leaders for science, art, and information and communications technology have left the school. The head of mathematics has gained promotion in another school and a replacement has yet to be appointed. Students in Year 11 now have one extra hour of mathematics teaching per week. The school plans to become an academy in September 2014, sponsored by the Saint Bonaventure Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Current information provided by the school on students' achievement indicates a slight rise in the proportion of students in Year 11 who are set to gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2014, including in English and mathematics. This is partly due to an improvement in standards in mathematics, aided by the support of an executive head of mathematics from a local outstanding school since January 2014, who spends a few hours a week in the school. Inspectors' observations of teaching and scrutiny of students' books to look at their progress over time supports the school's forecast. While achievement in mathematics is still behind that in English, significant gains have been made in the proportion of students making expected and better progress in mathematics. Students told inspectors that the additional mathematics classes held on a Saturday morning, which are targeted at students of all abilities, are helping them achieve better.

Gaps in attainment between those students eligible for the pupil premium and others in the school are closing steadily, but there is still some way to go. Since her arrival at the school, the Principal has identified inaccuracies in the exact number of students who are entitled to receive pupil premium funding. Consequently, all those entitled to receive additional support can now benefit from it.

Gaps in attainment between different subjects are also narrowing. However, forecasts for attainment in art, French, Spanish and sociology at GCSE level in 2014 indicate that many students still underachieve in these subjects.

The quality of teaching

The school's profile of the quality of teaching over time has become more realistic, and the proportion of good and better teaching has increased steadily since the previous inspection. While inspectors saw much teaching which is clearly having a stronger impact on students' progress, they also saw some teaching which, over time, has not had sufficient impact on accelerating their progress sufficiently. However, inadequate teaching has all but been eradicated. Teaching is particularly effective in English and in physical education, and is improving in mathematics. Many observations of teaching were conducted jointly with the school's senior leaders, and inspectors agreed with their judgements. The quality of teaching is steadily increasing because more teachers are planning lessons which take into account the specific learning needs and capabilities of all students in the class. More teachers are making smarter use of information provided to them by senior leaders about students' targets. Where teaching was particularly effective, students were encouraged to select starter activities which allowed them to assess their own progress, and then select a suitably challenging follow-up task.

While teachers' marking of students' work continues to improve and is certainly more regular, too few students are responding to their teachers' marking. Teachers' written comments are not always structured in such a way as to trigger a meaningful response from students. Some students told inspectors they did not know how they were expected to reply, and some teachers do not act swiftly enough when students have failed to respond.

The effectiveness of teaching assistants has still not been evaluated by the school. There are plans to allocate teaching assistants to subject areas from June 2014. The acting special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has set up operational systems which were previously not in place, ably supported by a consultant provided through the local authority, but there has not been enough strategic planning for the provision of disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and attitudes have continued to improve, both in lessons and around the school. Students told inspectors they had seen a clear improvement in behaviour since the appointment of the new Principal, and the introduction of a points system which encourages more positive attitudes towards learning. However, some also felt that not all teachers implement the behaviour sanction system fairly. This concern was also expressed during the previous inspection.

Systems for recording behavioural incidents and any incidences of racist or homophobic behaviour have become more refined. This means that when any such

incidents do occur, school leaders are better able to identify trends and tackle these more effectively.

Attendance has improved so that it is now closer to the national average. The proportion of students who are persistently absent from school has fallen sharply.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal has taken decisive action in relation to underperforming staff. This has allowed her to plan for a restructure at senior and subject leadership level so that new roles can be better matched to staff's skills. This process has taken time and necessitated support from the local authority's human resources services.

Systems and procedures are becoming more established and some have had greater impact than others. Most noticeably, the drive in improving the quality of teaching is a key priority which is clearly starting to have an impact on students' outcomes. Inspectors observed the weekly teaching and learning briefing session for subject leaders, during which successful teaching strategies were being discussed. Systems for evaluating the school's performance are developing, and the school now has a self-evaluation document which is fit for purpose.

Leaders have wisely reviewed the choice of subjects offered to students and have broadened the subject choice to be made available in the sixth form so that it caters for the needs of all students. Consequently, the number of internal applications for the sixth form has increased dramatically.

Members of the governing body demonstrate a good understanding of the school's current position and pose an appropriate level of challenge. The move towards academy status, although delayed, is now progressing as planned and is expected to be eased through the appointment of a Director of Transition to oversee all four schools which will be part of the Trust. DRET plans to play a greater role in supporting and challenging the school from May 2014 at the request of the diocese, and will continue to act as the School Improvement and Challenge Partner until at least 2016.

External support

The local authority has taken on board previous criticism that their monitoring activities replicated those of Ofsted. Although it rightly continues to monitor the performance of the school, it has also provided valuable support for the acting special educational needs coordinator as well as extending the provision of an existing consultant to three days per week. The local authority has also provided appropriate training for less-effective teachers, as well for those who hold positions of responsibility. The partnership with a local outstanding school, established by the Principal, continues to flourish and has been particularly beneficial to members of

the mathematics faculty. It is crucial that the support to be offered by both the local authority and by DRET planned up until the time when the school becomes an academy is coordinated efficiently, and is made known to all relevant parties, including the governing body.