

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566857

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jkinsman@cfbt.com



28 November 2014

Mr Patrick Murden
Headteacher
Our Lady and St John Catholic College
North Road
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 1PY

Dear Mr Murden

Special measures monitoring inspection of Our Lady and St John Catholic College

Following my visit with Fiona Dixon and Mary Lanovy-Taylor, Additional Inspectors, to the school on 26 and 27 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The headteacher may appoint newly qualified teachers only after collaboration with me before 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 Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching in all subjects, especially mathematics, humanities and languages, to be consistently good or better, and hence raise the achievement of all students to be at least good or better, by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that all teachers use information about how well students are achieving to set work that challenges all abilities, particularly the most able
 - ensuring that feedback to students and marking of their work consistently provides them with clear guidance about what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring that all teachers consistently follow the school policy for literacy, correcting basic spelling and grammar errors, and challenging students to communicate their ideas clearly in writing
 - ensuring that mathematics teaching develops students' understanding of mathematical concepts and gives them opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge to real life situations
 - ensuring that humanities teachers provide opportunities for students to analyse and evaluate information, so that they are able to reach the higher levels of attainment
 - ensuring that languages teachers give students sufficient opportunities to speak the language and practise using new vocabulary
 - ensuring that the teaching of English and mathematics in the sixth form is as good as the teaching in the vocational subjects.

- Improve behaviour across the school, by:
 - ensuring that students take responsibility for their own behaviour when they are unsupervised at breaks and lunchtimes, and that they show respect for each other, their teachers and the school environment
 - challenging students in lessons to take pride in their work and do their best at all times
 - improving attendance and reducing the proportion of students who are persistently absent
 - ensuring that the school's behaviour-management strategies are consistently and effectively applied by all teachers
 - taking steps to ensure that there is a harmonious community where students from different cultures and backgrounds interact well with each other.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels, so that leaders are able to raise achievement, improve the quality of teaching and improve behaviour, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations for what students can achieve setting challenging targets for students' progress

ensuring that the systems for checking how well the school is performing are robust, and based on a wide range of evidence

ensuring that leaders have clear action plans to bring about improvements, and that they regularly check whether the actions are having the required impact

ensuring that senior leaders are rigorous in holding middle leaders to account for the progress of students in their subjects systematically

sharing the good practice which exists in the school

ensuring all staff follow and support rigorously the school's behaviour management strategies.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 to 27 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors spent most time observing teaching in history, geography, religious education, languages and mathematics. They spoke with a range students in lessons and looked at their work. They observed form periods at the start of the morning and spoke with a group of Year 11 and a group of Year 7 students.

Inspectors met with senior leaders and teachers who lead subjects. They also met with a representative of the local authority and three members of the interim executive board (IEB). They met with a range of teaching and non-teaching staff and looked through the school's documentation.

Context

A new headteacher started in September following the retirement of the previous headteacher. In addition, from September, the local authority has part funded the leadership of a National Leader in Education for two days a week. The governing body was replaced by an IEB at the end of July. Two mathematics teachers have left the school and a few staff are absent on medical grounds.

Achievement of students at the school

Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 has declined. A lower proportion attained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics than in 2013. Students made less progress from the end of Year 6 to the end of Year 11 than in the previous year. In particular, attainment in mathematics, languages and geography remains a concern. There was, at the end of July, a vast difference between the school's predicted results and the actual GCSE grades indicating the school's assessment systems were neither accurate nor reliable. Since September, there has been notable improvement in the school's assessment systems leading to greater accuracy in the school's data about students' progress. This means that teachers are now able to have a clear idea of students' skills and understanding when they plan their lessons. However, it is too early to see any impact on students' achievement.

The gap in achievement between students whose circumstances make them disadvantaged and their peers widened by the end of the summer term. The school's data also indicate that by the end of July, many students made no progress in Year 7 and 8 when measured against their attainment at the end of Year 6. Fifty six students, for example, made no progress or went backwards by the end of Year 7 in mathematics. It is too early to see whether the changes made since September have tackled the underachievement.

The quality of teaching

The issues raised at the previous inspection about teaching remain. There has been little progress since February. Teaching in mathematics still focuses too much on learning, copying and following the rule rather than developing an understanding of the underlying mathematics. Teachers still do not develop students' reasoning or problem solving skills enough and students still complete work they would normally complete at primary school.

Over time, there has been little progress in the quality of teaching in languages. A very low number of students opt for French or Spanish at GCSE which indicates a lack of interest in the subjects or confidence in the teaching. There have been some small improvements since September. Teachers speak in the language more often during lessons and there is a little more focus on giving helpful marking and feedback to improve students' work.

There have been some improvements to history teaching. Students find lessons more engaging. There are more chances to look at and analyse historic sources and draw conclusions from them. In a lesson, for example, about why Adolf Hitler became chancellor, the teacher challenged and fully engaged all students, built on their prior learning and used his high expectations to make sure they all fully explained their answers when interpreting the sources. The high number of students opting for history in Year 10 is an indication of how much they like the teacher and the subject. The same improvements were not evident in geography. In this subject, students' work still indicates slow progress over time, a lack of challenge and low-level work.

The main improvements to teaching have taken place since September. There are examples of teachers using the good practice in science lessons to give better feedback to students about how to improve their work. Students respond and work on the things the teacher identified and their work improves. Not every teacher follows the system. In mathematics, for example, the marking is at times scant with a large red question mark or some ticks but not advice or guidance to develop students' thinking and no identification of students' errors or misconceptions. The marking still has little impact and students do not know what they should do to improve their work.

There have also been a few improvements to the teaching of the most-able students, mainly since September. There is a greater level of challenge, particularly in Years 10 and 11, better use of targets and assessment to plan lessons and teachers have raised their expectations of what students should produce in their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since the previous inspection, and in particular since September, there has been rapid improvement in students' behaviour. Attendance has risen. The amount of exclusions from class and from the school has fallen significantly. There is a harmonious atmosphere with different genders mixing well together in lessons and around school as well as students from different backgrounds. There is significant improvement on how leaders use students' views. For example, the most-able Year 11 students identified some significant deficiencies in the languages department and the headteacher made changes the next day to improve provision. Their views are collected, collated, taken seriously and acted upon. The school, however, has not acted to train all staff in how to tackle homophobic and derogatory language as I asked at my previous monitoring inspection.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The comment from a member of staff to the school's survey sums up the impact the new headteacher has had: 'the atmosphere around the school has transformed since September. Staff and pupils feel supported and valued. There is a strong sense of purpose, everything is aimed at improving outcomes for pupils.' This sentiment was echoed by another member of staff: 'The new headteacher is a great asset to the school who demonstrates great leadership skills.'

In the very short time the headteacher has been at the school, almost all of the school's systems, policies and procedures have been reviewed and improved. Senior leaders have frequent discussions with teachers who lead departments about the progress groups of students are making. There is greater accountability and responsibility. High quality, comprehensive departmental reviews have provided leaders with clear priorities for improvement. Senior leaders have used a greater range of evidence when monitoring teaching in the different subjects, including: students' work and their views; lesson observations and short visits to lessons; discussions with staff; and analysing assessment data. Middle leaders still do not have enough involvement in monitoring activities or on improving the quality of teaching in their subjects, however, they have started. They now have more autonomy to take decisions about how to improve provision in their subjects.

Although many of the changes are laudable, it is too early to see the impact they have had on improving students' achievement. However, the structural changes, such as moving to one lunchtime and having only one form time a day, have helped to improve students' behaviour.

Governance has improved significantly because of the creation of the IEB. Its members are highly skilled, highly knowledgeable and are in a position to challenge and support the school at a high level. As a result, there is a better understanding of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning.

External support

A National Leader in Education, who is executive headteacher of St Patrick's High School in Salford, provides high quality support to the school for two days a week. Specialist Leaders in Education have been brought in to help subject leaders to improve teaching in the areas they lead and to review teaching and learning. As a result, there are improved systems to check on the quality of teaching and there are improved assessment systems.

The local authority has provided effective support. It commissioned, in partnership with the diocese, a new headteacher for the school and significant input from teaching and learning experts who teach at St Patrick's. It provided financial advice and support and effective guidance through its personnel department to restructure and re-staff the school. It has also completed an audit to identify and tackle the large financial deficit identified in the school's budget.