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Mr Hugh O'Neill
Headteacher
St Benedict's Catholic School
Beetons Way
Bury St Edmunds
IP32 6RH

Dear Mr O'Neill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Benedict's Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- manage and present assessment data more clearly, so that it is easier to understand
- review the school's presentation policy, and tackle the inconsistencies that exist – especially between boys and girls.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, an assistant headteacher, four members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school's assessment and curriculum documentation and improvement plan. You accompanied me during visits to several lessons, where we observed learning and

looked at students' work. You, an assistant headteacher, the head of the English department and an English teacher joined me in a work scrutiny of students' writing from Years 7, 8 and 9.

Context

The deputy headteacher is currently absent from the school due to illness. An interim assistant headteacher started work at the school in January on a temporary basis to provide additional leadership support. The school is in the process of appointing a second deputy headteacher.

Main findings

The school has made progress in key areas since the inspection. Your improvement plan is clear and succinct. It prioritises the right areas and enables you and your senior leaders to evaluate the impact of your work. You have re-structured the senior leadership team. Roles and responsibilities are now much more clearly defined and this is helping you and governors to hold leaders to account more effectively. In addition, your approach to monitoring the quality of teaching has improved. As a result of more regular, informal checks, leaders are developing a better understanding of where the strengths in teaching lie and where improvement is needed. The support that teachers receive is more precisely focused and is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. For example, work to develop better skills in checking students' progress in years 7 and 8 means that teachers are more precisely judging what individual students need to do next in order to make progress.

School leaders have reviewed the curriculum in Key Stage 3. Detailed information about every subject that students study each term are now available on the school's website for parents to access. In addition to this, the school has begun a series of information evenings for parents. For example, one of these events is focused on the way the school has improved the teaching of citizenship since the previous inspection. These improvements include clear reference in curriculum plans as to how citizenship is planned across each term in every year group, and how this will prepare students for life in modern Britain.

The attainment gaps between disadvantaged and other students are narrowing. Although these gaps are much narrower than they were last year, they are still too wide in years 10 and 11. More work is needed to ensure that teachers, governors and leaders can very easily see the progress that students are making in each subject. The way that assessment data is presented is overly complex, and monitoring the progress of individuals or groups of students is difficult. Governors value the improvements that you have made to the information that you provide them with, but are confused by the way that achievement data is presented.

Your work to reduce absence has been successful. The school's levels of attendance is now in line with the national average for secondary schools. Similarly, your review

of the school's approach to exclusion has resulted in a much smaller number of exclusions. Students who would previously have been excluded for a fixed term are now much more likely to receive an internal exclusion, keeping them in school and enabling them to continue learning. Students' attitudes to their learning were positive in the lessons that we visited. For example, one boy wrote in his English book that he 'can't wait to finish reading the class book – it is so exciting!'.

During our scrutiny of students' writing it was clear that the quality of students' presentation is very mixed. Boys in particular do not take enough care with their handwriting. In almost all lessons that were visited we found some students' work to be untidy. This indicates a lack of pride in their work or the appreciation that they need to write legibly and neatly so that they are well prepared for work or further education.

External support

The local authority is providing a good level of support for the school. Advisers have promoted improvements in English and mathematics through their work with the newly appointed heads of these departments. In addition, a local authority officer is working with the leadership team to improve their work and was involved in arranging the secondment of an additional assistant headteacher.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector