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Special measures monitoring inspection of Holy Trinity Catholic Media Arts College

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2015, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, with the headteacher, groups of staff and senior leaders. I also met with a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of Handsworth Wood Girls' School, who has been commissioned to provide support for the school. I made short visits to a number of lessons and looked at the quality of work in students' books. The local authority's statement of action and the school improvement plan that forms part of this were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured. The headteacher of Handsworth Wood Girls' School has begun to work with leaders in the school. An external review of governance has been undertaken. The local authority is planning to carry out a full review of teaching later this month.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have begun to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. The staff I spoke to felt that they had a clear understanding of what needs to happen for the school to improve. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been changed so that they are better aligned to school improvement priorities. There are still areas of overlap in some of these roles, and in my next visit I will be exploring further the impact that all leaders are having in implementing the school action plan. Work has also been done to improve systems for the tracking of students' progress, including in Key Stage 3.

The school's evaluation of its work remains too generous. The analysis of achievement that was presented to me during the inspection focuses too much on areas of strength and fails to fully acknowledge shortcomings. For example, when analysing last year's performance, too little account is taken of clear weaknesses such as the poor progress of boys in English and the most able students in mathematics. The school's records show that the achievement of students in Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics continues to be weak in Year 9, and particularly in Year 8, where progress in English is inadequate. Unless accurate and honest evaluation is secured, the school's capacity to improve will remain limited.

Some of the staff that I spoke to felt that communications between staff and leaders had improved and that leaders are now more transparent in their decision-making. The outcomes of a recent staff survey reveal that some staff are still dissatisfied with the quality of leadership in the school, albeit a minority. Staff spoke highly of the training and other help they had received to improve their skills. Teachers say that leaders are now checking the quality of their teaching more regularly and offer them useful feedback. They recognised the importance of improving teaching, so that all students make good progress from the moment they enter the school, as key to the school's journey towards success. A few, however, struggle to accept the judgement of the previous inspection. This again is a barrier to securing urgently needed improvements.

During the short visits I made to classrooms, I saw how some aspects of staff training are beginning to be used in lessons. For example, teachers' work helped students to articulate what they needed to do in order to do well in their lesson. Some students felt that they had greater challenge in lessons and they were now encouraged more to 'aim high' by their teachers.

I also saw how practices in marking are beginning to develop. Teachers are increasingly ensuring that students respond to the guidance offered, and make resulting improvements to their work. Teachers' awareness of data and progress is starting to improve: in many of the lessons I went to, teachers presented me with an information pack that clearly showed what grade students were currently working at. However, teachers are not yet at the stage when they are able to use these data

in a sophisticated way to plan lessons so that all students make the progress that they should. Teachers' expectations are inconsistent. The quality of presentation of students' work, for example, varied both between and across subjects.

The local authority's statement of action and the accompanying school action plan are suitably focused on tackling the range of weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Clear actions have been identified to improve the quality of teaching, accelerate students' progress and strengthen leadership. A 'monitoring task force', consisting of representatives from the local authority and the support school, will monitor progress against this plan regularly. However, a weakness is that targets for students' achievement do not currently take different groups of students into account. Also, targets for measuring the impact of some proposed actions need to be at times simplified, or made more specific, so that success can be evaluated precisely by leaders and the monitoring task force. A full external review of teaching is to take place later this month. The plan needs to be updated in the light of the findings from this, so that an accurate baseline of the quality of teaching is recorded, against which progress can be measured.

The local authority has acted swiftly to commission much needed external support from an outstanding school. However, the school action plan does not make sufficient reference to the vital role that this external support will play in school improvement. Rigorous quality assurance checks and details of the training from external support need to be embedded throughout the plan in order to build the capacity of leadership, improve the quality of teaching, and ensure that accurate judgements are reached about the school's performance. It is vital too that the accuracy of teachers' assessments is quickly validated by the support school so that leaders, governors and the monitoring task force can be assured that information presented about students' progress is robust.

An external review of governance has now been undertaken. Although the full details of this report were not available during the inspection, the broad findings confirm the weaknesses in governance identified in the previous inspection. From my own discussion with governors, it is clear that there are significant training needs if governors are to be able to fulfil their duties in holding leaders to account for making the rapid improvements needed to the quality of education at the school. This is a serious concern. Urgent action needs to be taken to tackle these deficiencies.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector