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26 March 2015

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 Timothy Gartside and Andrew Henderson, additional inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 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 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 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may in negotiation with and subsequent approval by me, appoint newly qualified teachers 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 (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn.

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
 - 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 third monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching in a wider range of subjects than at the previous monitoring inspection including mathematics, English, science, history, geography, French, Spanish, dance and physical education (PE). They spoke with students informally during the school day and formally in three focused meetings. Inspectors discussed the impact of leadership with teachers who lead subject departments, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff who lead aspects of behaviour. They also held meetings with a representative of the local authority and members of the IEB (this is the board which replaced the governing body in 2014). Inspectors looked at students' work, the latest results from the school's assessments and looked through some examples of senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection six teachers left the school including two heads of departments. Members of the IEB have appointed two assistant headteachers who have started working for approximately a day a week until after Easter when they become full time. They have also appointed two mathematics teachers who will start after Easter.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In most subjects students are making faster progress and are therefore attaining higher standards. This is particularly the case for students in Year 11. A much higher proportion of students are on track to attain five good GCSEs. In particular, standards in mathematics are starting to improve rapidly. In this subject, a much higher proportion of the most able students in Year 11 are on course to attain A and A* in their up-coming GCSEs. In other subjects, however, many of the most able students are off-track to attain the higher grades particularly in art, history, information technology (IT), languages, drama and PE.

Students who are disadvantaged (those who are known to have eligibility for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) have in the recent past attained far less than their peers and made less progress. There are signs in the school's assessments that their progress is quickening and so the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is closing.

Standards remain lower in Years 7 to 10. In Year 8, for example, only half of students are making expected progress in English, mathematics and science. With the help of staff from the teaching school, teachers have identified students who are falling behind and have started to accelerate their progress.

The staff have worked hard to make sure their assessments are more accurate. Teachers are now held accountable for the accuracy of their predictions. Teachers' assessments of students in Year 11 have been externally moderated and verified and have been shown to be accurate.

The quality of teaching

Since my last visit in November the quality of teaching has improved, consequently, students are making more progress.

In mathematics there are more examples of problems to solve and well-designed questions that make students think, revise their previous learning and apply their knowledge. There still could be greater emphasis on students' explaining and proving their thinking and on fully understanding the mathematics rather than following a method or formula.

Teachers in history and geography are asking better questions to make students analyse and explain information from different sources and to think about the topic in more depth. There are some examples of improved links to English, for example writing non-fiction reports. There is still some way to go in Years 7 and 8 to make sure the activities are challenging enough for the most able students.

Students rightly reported their frustration at the lack of good teaching in languages and in technology. In languages, students' attainment remains a significant concern and this in-part is because they still have too few opportunities to speak the language. There has been an improvement, however. Teachers now introduce new vocabulary to students and allow them to apply the words in listening, speaking or writing exercises.

Teaching in other subjects such as science, English and dance remains higher quality. In these subjects students are fully engaged and engrossed in their learning because lessons are interesting and the content is well explained. Teachers in these subjects plan lessons based on tackling the errors students have made. They also make sure all groups of students are challenged and have the chance to respond to marking and improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour continues to improve. The amount of call-outs for senior leaders to tackle poor behaviour has reduced as has the amount of exclusions. The heads of each year group report that staff now consistently apply the sanctions and rewards and follow up incidents to make sure there is no reoccurrence. The atmosphere around the school is calmer and more cohesive. Students told inspectors that staff are more respectful in the way they speak to them. Students work and socialise together regardless of age, gender, ethnic heritage or religion.

Students' behaviour in lessons is better. They are more engaged in their learning which then has an impact in increasing the progress they make. In particular, behaviour in mathematics lessons has notably improved with less calling out, less off-task messing around and greater attention given to the teachers. This is linked directly to improvements in teaching. Students told inspectors that behaviour had improved in most lessons but there is still an issue in Years 7 to 9 and in some subjects, such as technology and languages.

All staff have been trained in how to identify and tackle derogatory language and types of bullying. Staff now have the confidence and the knowledge in how to tackle, for example, homophobic language and racism. Senior leaders also organised staff training with the help from the police, regarding extremism and radicalisation, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. The school has been selected to trial some innovative materials to develop students' ability to resist being drawn into extremist behaviour and views.

Senior leaders and the school council now need to work on tackling the large amount of litter left at lunch and break times and on tackling punctuality to school and low attendance rates.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership at all levels in the school is improving quickly and as a result, teaching is having more impact on increasing students' achievement. Teachers who lead subjects said they feel more valued as leaders and take more responsibility for teaching and learning in their subjects. Similarly, they track students' progress more frequently and in more depth and take actions to increase students' attainment. They give presentations to the IEB which then challenges them strongly about, for example, staff deployment and quality, the accuracy of their assessment predictions and on the actions they are taking to improve their subjects.

All leaders check frequently on the quality of teaching through looking at students' work, observing lessons, talking with teachers and through discussions with students. Some of the checks on students' work could be more detailed and more helpful in identifying precisely what the staff need to do to improve students' learning in that subject.

External support

The quality and impact of external support has been excellent. The headteacher has continued to provide shrewd strategic leadership to reorganise and restructure the staffing in most subject departments to pre-empt a substantial budget deficit and to significantly improve the quality of teaching. The capacity of the school to continue

improving has increased as many of the new appointments are specialist leaders in their subjects or are on a career path to become excellent teachers.

Saint Patrick's Teaching School, in addition to providing the headteacher, has also provided the significant skills of a National Leader in Education and teachers who give the highest quality challenge, advice, guidance and support. As a result, teachers' expectations of the amount of progress students should make have increased. The support has also raised the quality of teaching.

The local authority has provided very effective support and strategic guidance regarding, for example, staffing and finance. It has helped the school to make sure the admissions policy meets statutory requirements. The finance officer is working closely with senior leaders and the IEB to make sure the school has a long-term plan to tackle a predicted significant shortfall in funding. The local authority has also guided the IEB to make sure the school meets its obligations in informing parents and elected members about the proposed closure of the sixth form.

The IEB now needs to make a clear plan to employ a substantive headteacher and transfer to a full governing body.