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15 June 2015

Andrew Dawson
St Mary's Catholic High School
Manchester Road
Astley
Manchester
M29 7EE

Dear Mr Dawson

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

Following my visit to your school on 12 June 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 March 2015. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, as headteacher and other senior leaders. I also met the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a governor who is responsible for child protection and safeguarding. Additionally I had a discussion with a representative of the local authority (LA) and a representative of the Archdiocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plan was evaluated. I also made a brief tour of the school, met with a group of middle leaders and scrutinised examples of pupils' written work. In addition, I considered a range of policies and documentation related to the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

Context

Since the last inspection three new teachers and a new site officer have been appointed.

Main findings

You, senior leaders and governors have lost no time in taking robust action to ensure that the school swiftly becomes good. You have all made an energetic response to the findings of the last section 5 inspection that judged the school to require improvement.

You have galvanised the staff to embrace the new policies that you have put in place to ensure greater consistency, for example in marking. You have re-structured roles and responsibilities both of the teaching staff and the various committees of the Governing Body. This is already securing much clearer and sharper lines of accountability.

Middle leaders are enthused and excited by their roles and say that senior leaders give them freedom and allow them to undertake their leadership roles with confidence. They understand very well the urgency of the work at hand. Improved lines of communication have already begun to enable middle leaders to hold their teams to account much more rigorously. For example, through regular meetings with the senior leaders who manage their work.

You have placed quality of teaching very coherently at the heart of the school's work, with the result that teachers' expectations of what pupils can learn and how quickly, are rising. You and senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in the school. Leaders and staff appreciate the rich variety of professional development to which they have access. This enables them to benefit from high quality training from local expert professionals.

Morale is high and most staff are committed to the vision and direction that you have set for the school's rapid progress to good. Where this is not the case, senior leaders apply appropriate support and challenge and are not afraid to move teachers on if they fail to respond.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose, being well considered, coherent and sharply focused on the recommendations from the last inspection. Leaders at all levels, including governors, therefore understand well the school's key priorities for improvement. For example, all subject leaders can articulate their department's crucial role in developing pupils' numeracy and literacy through their subjects.

Measures, such as fortnightly work scrutinies and learning walks, inform leaders and governors of any slippage in the momentum of improvement, so that it can be quickly arrested.

It is too early for the impact of these well-focused changes to show significant impact, as yet, on pupils' achievement, in the eight weeks since the last inspection. However, the schools' provisional data for the 2015 examinations indicates improvement on 2014 outcomes. The school's capacity to improve the school quickly to good is also evident, for example, in leaders' actions to establish sharper monitoring of pupils' progress not only in Year 11 but throughout the school. While there are variations across subjects in the quality of marking, it is clear that the school is achieving increasing consistency.

Governors are deeply committed to the school. They recognise the need to focus on progress as well as attainment and talk knowledgeably about the progress of particular groups. They are determined to play their part in improving the school and are equipping themselves accordingly with appropriate skills. They are also keen to improve the school's communication with parents and other stakeholders. Governors are therefore undergoing a review of their practice in order to increase their effectiveness.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has made wise choices in drawing on a wide range of external support. Since the school has been judged to require improvement, the local authority is committed to contributing to this support. A National Leader of Education from an outstanding school is providing a review of the pupil premium expenditure. He is also supporting training for middle leadership and acts as a critical friend to the school, reporting to governors on the quality and effectiveness of initiatives. A former Her Majesty's Inspector is contributing to the development of governors' skills. Additionally, a local headteacher from a good school has trained all staff on improving pupil progress. He is also to focus on training senior and middle leaders in the effective observation of teaching. Finally, a senior leader from an outstanding local special school has undertaken an audit of the school's provision for pupils who have a disability or special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wigan local authority, the Archdiocese of Liverpool and as below.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body Local authority
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation