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Mrs Yvonne Lucey
Headteacher
Thomas Becket Catholic School
Becket Way
Kettering Road North
Northampton
NN3 6HT

Dear Mrs Lucey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Becket Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 February 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. The school should take further action to:

- Continue to support and develop leaders at all levels, especially those taking on new responsibilities.
- Ensure the school improvement plan has clear reference to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report, that responsibilities for actions and monitoring are clearly defined and intended outcomes are quantified whenever possible.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the Principal and vice-principal, the assistant principal with responsibility for the quality of teaching, the assistant

principal with responsibility for achievement, the special educational needs coordinator, the director of learning for mathematics and a representative of the local authority. I also held a telephone conversation with the chair of the interim executive board. I toured the school accompanied by the Principal and vice-principal to see the learning that was taking place. I held informal conversations with a few students as I toured the school. I looked at a range of documents including the academy improvement plan, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, a sample of students' work, plans for staff training and professional development and minutes of meetings of the interim executive board.

Context

Since the last inspection you have made a number of new staff appointments including a subject leader in information technology and teachers in science and physical education. You have also made new appointments for September including new directors of learning for science, English and both pastoral and curriculum aspects of the Year 7 Phoenix programme. You have also appointed a lead practitioner, an assistant director of learning in English and two new teachers in English and mathematics. As a result of recruitment to these posts and re-structuring of the timetable, you have considerably reduced your reliance on supply staff for the next academic year.

The interim executive board is continuing discussions with the diocese and the Department for Education about becoming an academy.

Main findings

Teachers have become more confident using data when they plan lessons due to the training they have received and the high expectations of senior leaders that this is a routine part of their work. Teachers make good use of standards folders which include data tracking sheets to helpfully record planning and progress of individual students and groups.

Leaders ensure there is close scrutiny of achievement data at each assessment point so that students who are underachieving are identified and interventions are put in place promptly to help them to do better. Directors of learning meet with each member of their department to discuss next steps for individual students. Leaders also work with the special educational needs coordinator and directors of learning to analyse the performance of groups of students to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for all students according to the areas in which they need help. As a consequence, interventions are more useful and have led to students doing better in their studies. The gaps in progress made by students eligible for pupil premium and their peers have narrowed substantially, especially in recent months. The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs shows similar trends.

Senior leaders carry out a similarly thorough analysis of information gathered through the monitoring of the quality of teaching. They use focus weeks, when lesson observations take place, to record strengths and areas for development in the quality of teaching of every teacher. Senior leaders then carefully analyse this information to put together bespoke programmes of training and support. You have a comprehensive plan for the professional development of all teachers. The training and support you provide are effective so that the quality of teaching has improved. Leaders also make excellent use of links with local outstanding schools to provide opportunities for teachers to observe good practice and take part in coaching programmes.

Teachers' use of good quality marking and feedback is more consistent within and between departments. Teachers make regular use of feedback and activity sheets. The quality of students' responses is improving, using 'my response is....' sheets, especially when they are given time in the lesson to complete these. The sheets are being developed further in mathematics. A resource bank of challenging tasks is well-used to deepen students' thinking or practice areas in which they have difficulty. The director of learning for mathematics ensures that teachers plan lessons together to enable them to share good practice.

Teachers regularly develop students' use of technical terminology, boost literacy and numeracy across different subjects and provide practical tips for students to help remember key facts.

You have appointed assistant heads of year who play an important part in supporting better management of behaviour in lessons. They are able to support individual students who are at risk of being distracted so that instances of low-level disruption to learning have reduced. You ensure that students' attendance is reviewed regularly and have introduced new reward schemes which have helped boost attendance.

The directors of learning have received valuable training to develop their leadership skills. They are increasingly confident and well-placed to hold members of their teams to account for the quality of teaching in their subject areas. They have responded well to opportunities to work and train together as well as to the one-to-one support they have received from experienced colleagues. You now call the meetings of directors of learning 'the Heartbeat forum' to reflect the importance of this group to the continued progress of the school.

Your improvement plan is clearly presented in sections that incorporate areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. It would be helpful to make direct reference to these key areas to highlight that they are being addressed as part of the plan. In places, key performance indicators read more as actions. These should be quantifiable and so more accurately measurable wherever possible. It would also help evaluation of progress by adding more frequent and specific dates

when monitoring will take place and make a clear distinction between those responsible for specific actions and for monitoring progress.

Directors of learning are compiling their department improvement plans to mirror the format and headings of the whole school plan so that all teachers recognise their role in addressing the areas for improvement.

The interim executive board and the local authority work closely together to ensure that the school's leaders receive the support they need to address the areas for improvement promptly and effectively. The interim executive board and the local authority have an accurate review of the priorities for the school.

External support

You receive valuable support from two local outstanding schools in providing training and professional development opportunities for all staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- Diocese of Northampton