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Mr Mark Cooper
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cooper

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

Following my visit to your school on 8 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to improve the teaching and learning and progress of pupils in computer science and physical education (PE).

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, a deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. I also met with the chief executive officer of the Gorse Academies Trust (TGAT), a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese of Leeds, to discuss the support and actions taken since the last inspection. School documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, improvement plans and other relevant documents, was scrutinised. I conducted short visits to several lessons with the senior leader responsible for teaching and learning. A sample of pupils' work was reviewed with middle leaders. I also met with a group of pupils

from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 to evaluate their views on developments since the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in the senior and middle leadership of the school. A senior leader, the curriculum leader for technology, the lead practitioner for mathematics and teaching staff from the computer science department have left. A new, experienced deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2017. New middle leaders were appointed for the technology and computer science departments, along with two new specialist teaching staff. You and governors commissioned an external review of pupil premium spending and have begun to act on its findings.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have acted swiftly and decisively. You reviewed all areas of the school, correctly identifying and prioritising areas for improvement. You took robust action to eradicate weak teaching and to challenge ineffective leadership at all levels, including the senior and middle leadership. You redistributed key roles and responsibilities. Together with the chair of governors, you managed staffing changes effectively and appointed experienced staff to some key areas of responsibility, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher. As a result, leadership and management have been strengthened further and the rate of school improvement has accelerated. Leaders and governors have taken a range of appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your improvement plans are detailed, focused and evaluated accurately against clear criteria for success. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning, and the progress of pupils, including the disadvantaged and most able pupils, are improving.

Following the findings from the last inspection, you and governors commissioned an external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding. You and your leadership team acted quickly after the last inspection, and before the external review took place. You started to implement a number of strategies to address the weaknesses identified in the last report, for example bespoke staff training on the most effective strategies for improving the progress of the disadvantaged pupils, expanding the literacy programme for pupils in key stage 3 to include pupils in Year 9, mentoring of pupils, and holiday homework. You and your leaders have made great strides in acting on the recommendations and implementing strategies so that the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged pupils improve. As a result, outcomes for all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, improved in 2017 and inspection evidence indicates that this improvement continues for the current cohort of pupils.

During the joint visits to lessons with your senior leader responsible for teaching and learning and scrutiny of pupils' work, we were able to confirm that the expectations are high and the quality of the questioning by the teachers supports all pupils to accelerate their learning. Teachers plan learning activities to match the needs of all pupils, including the disadvantaged and most able pupils. Teachers know the pupils in their classes well, and use individual progress information effectively to provide appropriate challenge. Questioning is used effectively to check pupils' understanding and encourage independent thinking and resilience.

There is now a greater focus on providing high-quality teaching as well as, where appropriate, additional bespoke support for disadvantaged pupils. Our visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books indicate that current work in pupils' books shows that disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved, so that there is now little difference between the quality of their work and that of other pupils. School assessment information indicates that in some areas disadvantaged pupils make better progress than that of their peers, for example in Years 7 and 8. The newly introduced pilot of the 'Red Zone' initiative is valued by pupils and provides all pupils with opportunities to write at length and to demonstrate their understanding of more difficult key concepts.

Governors have a wide range of knowledge and expertise, including experience from the education sector. They meet regularly and have access to detailed reports. Governors have worked closely with you to improve the lines of accountability across the school and, as a result, middle leaders, for example, present information to governors regularly. Each governor is aligned to an aspect of the school, including pupil premium funding. Governors are involved in scrutinising progress information at each assessment point and are confident in interpreting school information. As a result, they understand better the school's strengths and weaknesses and ask sharply focused questions, providing more rigorous challenge.

Since the last inspection, you acted quickly to raise the profile of the most able and the disadvantaged pupils across the whole school. You reinforced the target-setting procedures and raised expectations. You empowered staff to take ownership of the progress of these groups of pupils. Staff are able to provide appropriate support to those who need it. For example, after assessments pupils have the opportunity to improve their progress through the 'Fix It' period. As a result, the difference in progress and attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is diminishing in a number of year groups and in a wide range of subjects. Current school assessment information and inspection evidence indicate continuing improvement in outcomes, following on from last year's improvements. However, leaders acknowledge that current school assessment information shows the need for improvement in the outcomes of pupils in computer science and PE.

You and your leaders have established a carefully planned cycle of checking the quality of teaching and learning in the school, through frequent visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. You have skilfully linked the school's progress tracking

systems to the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. You introduced systems, such as the 'confidence score quality assurance system', which allow your senior leaders to monitor more accurately the work of the middle leaders. You quickly reviewed the school's staffing structures and you have ensured that lines of accountability are clear. Senior leaders use regular standards review meetings effectively to check on the impact of new strategies. You made sure that staff receive appropriate training on various teaching and learning initiatives. Staff work collaboratively on developing further the effectiveness of questioning, for example through peer-to-peer lesson observation. As a result, teaching and learning have improved.

External support

The school works collaboratively with TGAT and the Yorkshire Teaching Schools Alliance and has received support from the local authority and the Diocese of Leeds. The governors and local authority brokered your partnership with TGAT. The local authority school improvement adviser knows the school well and has regular reviews with you to support your school's continuous improvement. The local authority provides professional development opportunities and training for leaders in the school. The diocese provides support for newly appointed governors. As a result, leaders at all levels are more confident and action plans are focused and accurately evaluated. You have ensured that leaders at all levels in your school are more outward facing. You and your staff are beginning to see a positive impact from the recently agreed collaboration with TGAT in a number of initiatives such as curriculum mapping, 'Red Zone' and reading circles.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leeds. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis

Her Majesty's Inspector