

20 November 2005

Mr J O'Neill
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Neill

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school with Mrs A Wallis, Mr J Clark and Mr C Penter Additional Inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2004.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

During the visit 18 lessons or parts of lessons were observed. Meetings were also held with yourself, the senior leadership team, some middle managers and other nominated staff. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and pupils. A range of documents was scrutinised.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2005, the school has appointed a new assistant headteacher and a temporary deputy headteacher, both of whom started in September 2005. The management structure has been changed to provide key stage leaders and a head of sixth form. Since the November 2004 inspection, eleven teachers have been appointed to replace staff who have left the school.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry have fluctuated slightly in recent years, varying from average to slightly below average.

In English, standards at Key Stage 3 were below average in both the 2004 and 2005 national tests. At GCSE standards were broadly average in 2005 and achievement between Key Stage 3 and 4 was satisfactory. However a significant proportion (about 30%) of pupils were not entered for the examination.

Results in the national tests in mathematics in Key Stage 3 were below average in both 2004 and 2005. Progress in 2004 was unsatisfactory. The progress made by the 2005 cohort from a lower baseline was slightly better than that of the previous years. At GCSE standards are average and progress is satisfactory.

In science standards on entry for the 2005 Year 9 cohort were broadly in line with the national average. Standards in the Key Stage 3 national tests were significantly below the national average, the school being placed in the lowest 15% nationally. At GCSE standards in 2005 were below the national average. In the lessons seen, standards were below average, with poor staff deployment and lesson organisation occasionally restricting the pupils' progress. The standards attained by girls in science are low and have fallen in recent years.

Progress on the areas identified by the inspection in November 2004

- Raise standards in Year 9 and in GCSE: reasonable progress, although this was better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3.

Personal development and well-being

Learning is supported by satisfactory behaviour overall, although there have been instances of unsatisfactory behaviour and poor attitudes. The quality of pupils' learning is best where it is stimulated by well planned work and lessons with good pace. However, not all teachers ensure that classroom rules are fully enforced.

During the inspection attendance in some lessons was poor, with over a third of pupils being absent. Overall attendance remains low, but the school has set an appropriate target for this.

Quality of provision

Overall, teaching in the lessons seen was satisfactory. It was good or outstanding in a third of lessons and inadequate in a sixth. In the best lessons, planning was rigorous, teachers showed good knowledge of their subject and good classroom management techniques with work well related to examination requirements. Pupils were given responsibility for their learning; they asked challenging questions and were encouraged to think for themselves. Teaching in mathematics was consistently good. However, in one A level science class the teaching was limited to supervision

of the completion of worksheets: in such lessons, the teacher's classroom management skills were inadequate, although the good support provided by classroom assistants enabled the pupils to make some progress and raised the overall quality of teaching.

After a time of staffing turbulence, recent appointments are beginning to provide stability and to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. The school has begun to address planning issues, with departmental reviews seeking to establish common patterns of planning for the long, medium and short term. This is clearly evident in the mathematics department; however, elsewhere it is uneven and the school should monitor the implementation of this policy. Not all staff are following the school's policies or directions of the senior leadership team with the consistency required to secure improvement.

The revised staffing structure has been accompanied by a well planned assessment review which is currently being implemented. This provides for a more rigorous use of data; target setting for individual pupils is reviewed with tutors on a ten week cycle throughout the school year. Not all staff are adequately familiar with the data or fully conversant with its use with pupils. The 2005 Key Stage 3 and GCSE examination results were analysed by the school for the first time to identify areas for development. Although some heads of subject are able to use data accurately, training in data interpretation is required. Staff have recently had training in the use of National Curriculum levels to enable students to understand what they need to do in order to progress. Assessment of pupils' and students' work has been considered in departmental reviews and there is evidence of consistent progress in the provision of assessments which can inform pupils' future work. Pupils' work is marked consistently, with helpful diagnostic comments in the best examples seen. This practice is not yet consistent across all subjects.

The school has adopted a scheme of work for citizenship and has planned in-service training for this. There are also plans for monitoring this area.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning: reasonable progress.
- Improve the assessment of standards and progress: reasonable progress.
- Meet the statutory requirements regarding citizenship education: reasonable progress.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall; they have been strengthened by recent appointments. The new management structure has yet to have a significant impact, although the leadership team has gained the confidence of key middle managers. There is evidence that recent appointments are beginning to make a positive impact on the school's organisation. As the school has moved back into its premises following a flood, and as new equipment has arrived, the

reorganisation has begun to raise morale and to provide staff and students with evidence of positive developments. The introduction of an assessment calendar, linked to regular target setting for pupils and students, is a good development. Self evaluation has begun to be addressed much more rigorously than in the past; for instance the 2005 examination results have been analysed and target setting has begun to be implemented. The monitoring of teaching by senior managers has been well targeted and is providing an accurate view of the quality of provision.

There are currently four vacancies on the governing body.

Progress on the areas identified by the inspection in November 2004

- Improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation: good progress.

External support

The local authority's planned review visit had to be curtailed due to bad weather; although a report was produced, a further monitoring visit is planned for February 2006. The School Improvement Officer has provided consistent support. However, there is still a need for support to be provided for the headteacher, particularly when the acting deputy head is replaced by a new appointment in January 2006.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures: satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection: satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to ensure that the arrangements for assessment, monitoring and target setting are fully implemented across all departments.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Corporate Director of Education for Cumbria and the Diocese of Lancaster

Yours sincerely

Martin Bradley
H M Inspector