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Mr Peter Tite
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tite

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady and St John Catholic College

Following my visit to your school on 4 April 2019, 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

The school should take further action to:

- improve teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, make greater progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - thoughtfully consider how they sequence pupils' learning
 - provide pupils with enough opportunity to acquire and understand new knowledge before being expected to apply it to different situations
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' work.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the executive principal, representatives of the governing body, a group of pupils and a group of middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and the self-evaluation document were evaluated. A series of learning walks were undertaken with leaders. The inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' work alongside leaders. A range of documentation relating to school improvement was also considered.

Context

There has been considerable change at the school since the previous inspection. The school now works more closely with St Patrick's Roman Catholic High School, which is a teaching school. The headteacher at the time of the previous inspection is now the executive principal of both St Patrick's Roman Catholic High School and Our Lady and St John Catholic College. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2017. The school has an independent governing body, which has statutory responsibility for the school's work.

A number of new middle leaders have joined the school since the previous inspection, including leaders of mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. The school has increased the number of leaders who are allocated to supporting different year groups. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) began working at the school at the beginning of the current school year. He is employed by St Patrick's Roman Catholic High School. Many of the school's middle and senior leaders work closely with other schools to develop different aspects of their provision. The timings of the school day have been restructured since the last inspection.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have an accurate, balanced and perceptive understanding of the school's effectiveness. They understand where clear improvements have been made but do not underestimate the scale of the challenge still facing the school. In particular, they recognise that more needs to be done to address the remaining weaknesses in teaching and pupils' outcomes. They have appropriate and credible plans to improve the school further. These plans are built upon a firm commitment to the school's Catholic ethos and values.

Leaders have created an inclusive and caring community. Pupils feel immense pride in being members of the school. They enthusiastically subscribe to the school's respectful and inclusive values. They appreciate the professional and friendly relationships that they enjoy with staff, who they feel 'go the extra mile' on their behalf.

Staff are equally positive about working at the school. They feel that leaders have

created a vibrant professional culture which encourages them to be reflective and think deeply about different aspects of their work. Staff also value the career opportunities that are available to them. Many are given the chance to work closely with colleagues from other schools, which reflects the school's open and outward-facing approach. These experiences are helping them to improve different aspects of the school's work, such as the use of pupil premium funding.

Since the previous inspection, senior and middle leaders have become more established in their roles. This has enabled them to develop a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of various aspects of their work. In turn, this has helped them to take actions that are leading to demonstrable improvement, particularly in relation to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Governors have overseen the school's journey capably. They have been relentless in their support of the school but have robustly challenged leaders when certain aspects of the school's improvement have lost momentum. For example, they stringently held leaders to account for the weaknesses in pupils' performance in external examinations in 2018. Governors and leaders have managed the school's finances prudently. They have been creative with their strategy to recruit and retain effective middle and senior leaders against a backdrop of financial hardship.

Leaders have improved the school's engagement with parents and carers. This is helping to improve the school's reputation in the local community and has contributed to the school being oversubscribed for the last few years.

The performance of Year 11 pupils in the 2018 external examinations indicated that they had made less progress across the curriculum than their counterparts from the previous year. The progress of disadvantaged pupils declined sharply, as did the progress of all pupils in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) remained weak. However, this picture tells only part of the story. There were a number of pupils in the year group who, despite being supported capably by the school, struggled to overcome significant personal challenges. Outcomes for these pupils had a disproportionately negative impact on performance data for the school.

Leaders' information indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are making significantly better progress than those who left in 2018, particularly in English. This reflects the general improvements that have been made to teaching, learning and assessment. Despite this, the improvements that have been made to pupils' outcomes are uneven across the curriculum and between different groups of pupils. Improvement in the progress of disadvantaged pupils is less pronounced than it is for other pupils. Similarly, the improvements in English are more significant than those seen in mathematics. This reflects continuing weaknesses in teaching and the stark variability that remains in the effectiveness of teaching between and within subjects.

Leaders' close but unobtrusive monitoring has given them a clear understanding of

where teaching is most and least effective. Where teaching is identified as being particularly weak, leaders ensure that appropriate support is put in place to help teachers. Where this is the case, teaching has typically improved.

Despite this, leaders have been less effective at addressing some of the more common limitations in teaching. In particular, teachers are not consistently sequencing pupils' learning effectively. This impacts negatively on the security of pupils' learning and their ability to recall what has been taught in the past. Teachers often expect pupils to apply new learning to different situations too quickly, without providing pupils with enough opportunity to acquire and understand new knowledge. Teachers often expect pupils to complete demanding tasks, such as questions from past GCSE examinations, without helping them to master the different components of learning that would enable them to complete such tasks well. Added to this, there is still too much variation in teachers' expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce. As a result, some pupils do not take enough care with their work. This is reflected in the quality, depth and presentation of pupils' work.

Leaders are focused on improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. They have commissioned a review of their use of pupil premium funding, which has validated the impact of the school's work on improving the attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils. The school is helping to remove barriers to learning typically faced by disadvantaged pupils at the school. This is enabling them to make greater progress across the curriculum, although leaders are aware that improvements for this group are not as significant as those for others at the school.

The new SENCo has started to make widespread improvements to provision for pupils with SEND. He has improved how well the school meets the needs of the significant number of pupils who have been identified as facing challenges in relation to their social, emotional and mental health. A bespoke provision has been created to provide intensive support for those pupils with the most acute needs. The school counsellor also works closely with these pupils and, as a result of targeted training, staff are more skilled at reducing the anxiety of these pupils. As a result, there has been a huge reduction in the number of behavioural incidents for these pupils.

Staff now receive regular training on matters relating to different areas of need. Staff are therefore more able to identify potential SEND. Teaching assistants have been redeployed and are making a stronger contribution to meeting pupils' needs. For example, they lead sessions to help pupils improve their reading and to support pupils who have needs relating to speech, language and communication. This has improved the school's adoption of a graduated response to meeting pupils' needs. Overall, there have been significant improvements to the attendance, behaviour and progress of pupils with SEND.

Leaders have overhauled the school's systems for managing pupils' behaviour. To support these changes to policy and procedure, staff have been trained in aspects

of positive behaviour management, such as how to de-escalate situations when pupils become anxious. Leaders' information indicates that there has been a reduction in the frequency of recorded behavioural incidents. This is despite a renewed focus on staff recording behavioural incidents reliably and in a timely manner.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the site. They are calm, respectful and considerate of others. Pupils told the inspector that behaviour is much improved and that very few lessons are disrupted by low-level misbehaviour. Leaders have also developed a number of alternative strategies to the use of fixed-term exclusion. Alongside the general improvements that have been made to pupils' behaviour, this has enabled leaders to significantly reduce rates of fixed-term exclusion.

The school has implemented a broad and highly effective strategy to improve attendance. For example, leaders have increased the amount of contact with the parents of pupils who have unnecessary time off school and they have focused on rewarding pupils who attend regularly. As a result, rates of attendance have improved significantly. Pupils' attendance for the current school year to date is above historical national averages. Correspondingly, there has also been a significant decline in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. The proportion of pupils who have been regularly absent during the current school year is also below historical national averages. This reflects both the precise strategies that leaders have used to improve attendance and the broader improvements that have made the school a place that pupils want to attend.

External support

Leaders from the school have received significant support from St Patrick's teaching school. This has helped them to improve different aspects of their work, such as the support offered to pupils with SEND. Leaders have also been involved in supporting colleagues from other schools. The experience of this work is enabling them to improve the quality of education that is offered to pupils at the school. Despite this, the effectiveness of teaching remains too variable between and within subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector