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30 November 2015

Mr Patrick Murden
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr Murden

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

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 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 June 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you; senior leaders; subject leaders for English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and religious education; a group of 10 pupils; and two members of the interim executive board (IEB), which provides governance for the school, to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection. I spoke with a representative of the local authority following the inspection. I evaluated documents including the school's self-evaluation summary, improvement plans, information about teaching and learning, summaries of pupils' achievement, and minutes of meetings of the senior leadership team and the IEB.

Samples of pupils' work were examined. I undertook a tour to see the school at work accompanied by you. I scrutinised the single central record of employment checks on staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, seven teachers have left and four have joined the school. You have taken further steps to ensure that the courses offered and deployment of staff better meet the needs of the school. Subject departments and the offices of senior leaders have been relocated. The sixth form has closed. Discussions about the longer-term governance of the school have taken place.

Main findings

The rapid improvement in the school since September 2014 has continued. You, together with senior leaders and other members of staff, have ensured that expectations have been raised further, leading to a higher quality of teaching. Staff recognise the changes in the school and have developed the confidence needed to rise to your ambitious challenge of becoming an outstanding school within two years. They frequently described this to me in terms of becoming a 'Wow school'. The school's own records indicate that the standards reached by pupils who left the school in 2015 were similar to those of pupils leaving in 2014. However, these results reflect faster progress because Year 11 in 2015 had lower starting points when they joined the school. The results in 2015 show that outcomes in subjects including geography, physical education and religious education rose very rapidly and improvement continued in mathematics.

Senior leaders' evaluation of the school is honest and accurate. The school has a detailed plan which sets out the school's response to three of the four broad areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. However, details about improvement to the school's website and communication with parents and prospective pupils are not included. You have prepared a detailed specification of the improvement expected across the school each half term. These records allow you to ensure that improvement stays on track, and demonstrate what has already been achieved.

Your strategy to improve teaching continues to be successful. Specific training has led to all teachers developing their expertise including that needed to help pupils improve their speaking skills. In addition, you successfully recruited new teachers with the skills needed for them to be effective. The improving teaching led to increases in the achievement of the most-able pupils in Year 11 in 2015. Overall, when compared with 2014, pupils gained a greater number of A and A* grades in their GCSEs, with three times more in mathematics and increases in English and science. The gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others are closing in some subjects. Staff have a better awareness of the progress of all pupils in Year 11 and can use extra support for pupils who need it to catch up. You have

ensured that higher-level teaching assistants focus on helping disadvantaged pupils. I saw this arrangement working well during our tour of the school.

Senior leaders have continued to develop the school's systems to check how well pupils are doing. The systems provide staff with detailed information about Year 11 pupils. This information is shared with middle leaders so that they can ensure that class teachers are matching teaching to the pupils in their classes. Leaders intend to include Year 10 pupils later in this school year. A similar system is being put in place for pupils in Key Stage 3; this is at an early stage.

You and other senior leaders have ensured that rigorous steps have been taken to make sure that pupils are more aware of the risks they may face, including those from people who may try to exploit them or who have radical views. The new coordinator for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) has revised the teaching programme for PSHE. This includes teaching in tutor time and other lessons, assemblies and additional special events. At the time of this inspection, the school was part-way through a series of workshops for all pupils about the dangers of radicalisation. Pupils who had already completed the workshops have written positive reflections about their learning. Similarly, staff have received training about the government's 'Prevent' strategy with more planned for the future. School staff work well with external partners to protect pupils when this is required. The school's single central record of employment checks meets requirements.

The school has made less progress in responding to the area for improvement from the previous inspection about the website and its use to communicate with parents and prospective pupils. A new website has been set up but the systems to keep it up to date are not streamlined. New policies and other required information, for example about the way the school uses additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, are available in school but not on the website. In addition, there are no details about this area for improvement in the post-inspection plan. In other ways, communication with prospective pupils is improving. For example, senior leaders are working closely with local Roman Catholic primary schools in coordinating the training offered by St Patrick's Teaching School.

The IEB's work continues to be highly effective in providing a balance between strong support and rigorous challenge. You provide the IEB with detailed information about the school's progress and its members are further well informed through meetings including other leaders. This means that members of the IEB are able to be probing as they scrutinise the school's work.

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 is continuing to receive well-planned support from St Patrick's Teaching School. This includes identifying and making available staff to join the school, access to specialist leaders of education to support subject development, providing training and shared checking of the accuracy of teachers' assessment in both schools. In addition, the executive principal of the teaching school continues her close mentoring relationship with you. Increasingly, specialist leaders of education from Our Lady and St John Catholic College are providing support to other schools. You have longer-term plans for this to increase but you are also aware of the need not to compromise the school's own rapid improvement.

The school also receives support from the diocese and the local authority. Both are represented on the IEB. The school uses services provided by the local authority to support governance, personnel decisions and financial management. You are currently the chair of the secondary school improvement group within the local authority's school improvement system. The diocese is fully involved in ongoing discussions to ensure that governance can move from the IEB to a new permanent arrangement. This change is being carefully considered so that governance remains as effective, for example in ensuring stability with most members of the IEB committing to be involved in governance whatever future arrangement is established.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen and the Director of Education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector