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28 March 2011

Mr S Hayes  
Headteacher  
St John Fisher Catholic High School  
Park Lane  
Peterborough  
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Dear Mr Hayes

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you could also thank members of staff, the pupils and the governing body.

There have been some changes to the school context since the last inspection. There has been restructuring of the senior leadership team which now consists of one deputy headteacher, a business manager and three assistant headteachers. There have also been some significant changes at middle leadership level including a new head of science. A new system of middle management is about to be implemented and the school is to move to a vertical tutoring system from the current year group system. The Interim Executive Board was replaced by a new governing body in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 3 March 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the time of the last inspection the percentage of students gaining five GCSE passes at A\*–C grades has been steadily rising. The trend for five GCSE passes at A\*–C grades including English and mathematics has also improved, but by a smaller margin. Despite these improvements, attainment remains significantly below the national average. Overall, students are making satisfactory progress considering their low starting points. However, progress in English is better than in mathematics. Since the last inspection rates of progress dipped in mathematics but have accelerated in English. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities

September 2010



and those who speak English as an additional language achieve in line with their classmates.

Since the last inspection, better leadership and management of teaching and learning is developing the school's overall capacity to improve. Systems to check the quality of teaching are now more rigorous. Members of both the senior and middle management teams monitor the quality of teaching through lesson observation and work scrutiny. Inspection evidence concurs with the school's own monitoring. Tutoring is becoming increasingly effective and links well across both the academic and personal aspects. Improved tracking systems ensure that any pupils in danger of underachieving or encountering difficulties in their learning are identified so that interventions can be made to boost their attainment. Pupils have opportunities to discuss barriers to learning and are able to take more responsibility for their own learning. However, although target sheets and 'flight path charts' are evident in students' exercise books, these are not always completed or used well enough to promote better progress. The planned change to vertical tutoring in June should streamline the system.

Teachers' questioning skills are developing satisfactorily and there are examples of open-ended targeted questioning sessions in lessons which encourage pupils to hypothesise and to think hard about possible answers. A good feature of lessons is the improving quality of paired and group work, which promotes independent learning well. Pupils are encouraged to participate effectively and teaching assistants provide helpful support for some groups. In a mathematics lesson a good paired card matching activity ensured that pupils recalled their prior learning about graphs well and applied it to work done on equations. Students were heard posing good mathematical arguments. Lessons focus well on speaking and listening during periods of group and paired discussion. This ensures that pupils who speak English as an additional language are able to make similar progress to their peers. In addition most staff take the time to regularly refer to key vocabulary and examination terminology as and when necessary. They also check students' understanding through following up with specific questions. However, teachers do not always prepare work that closely matches the needs of all pupils, and this results in all students receiving the same tasks. For example, in personal, social and health education the most able pupils were not challenged well enough. As a result some sat marking time because the tasks set were too easy and were quickly completed. However, in English the least able pupils were provided with storyboards to help with their writing, which enabled them to achieve more and make better progress.

Marking is inconsistent across the school and between subjects. During the monitoring visit, inspectors looked at a large sample of mathematics and English books and the work available in lessons observed. The marking policy is out of date and does not focus sharply enough on the most important aspects of marking for improvement. The sample of books looked at during the visit contain a degree of regular marking but the quality of written feedback is highly variable. Some comments are cursory while others adhere to the school's marking policy by showing

what went well and how the work could have been better. However, even when there are more detailed constructive comments, teachers do not follow them up to make sure pupils act upon them. Despite many requests for students to make definitive improvements, there is scant evidence of impact on their performance. There is good evidence of the growing use of peer assessment, and this benefits learners considerably. For example, pupils commented on each other's response to literature and how they showed understanding of character through language. Pupils praise the quality of verbal feedback provided during lessons and say that this is most effective in helping them to improve their work because it happens 'on the spot.' Inspectors also saw this during lessons. The use of exam criteria helps students to move forward with their learning and to produce work of a higher standard. In an A-level general studies lesson, it was clear that assessing the response of an unknown student using the marking criteria helped students to understand what is required in their own answers.

The school appreciates the valuable support the local authority provides, the work of consultants and the support and challenge of the school improvement partner.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat  
**Additional Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Improve attainment and achievement for all pupils by ensuring that all lessons:
  - are closely matched to pupils' individual needs and include all learners fully
  - extend pupils' abilities to articulate their thinking and their reasoning, using extended answers, including through group and paired work
  - have an emphasis on the development of pupils' spoken English, including key subject vocabulary and examination terminology as appropriate.
  
- Enable pupils to understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve in each aspect of their academic and personal development by:
  - maximising the use of target setting and tracking systems, both in lessons and through the tutoring system, so that pupils can take more responsibility for their own learning
  - ensuring that all staff consistently adhere to the school's marking policy, thereby giving pupils regular and constructive feedback on their work
  - ensuring that in each lesson, pupils reflect on what they have learnt, how this relates to their targets, and what are the next steps for improvement.