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31 March 2011

Mr B Conboy
Headteacher
Our Lady's Catholic College
Morecambe Road
Lancaster
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Conboy,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Our Lady's Catholic College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Johan McKinnon, additional inspector, on 30 March 2011. Thank you for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, students and governors who met us.

Since the last inspection, phase one of the sixth-form building project has been completed with further refurbishment planned for the summer. The school has entered into a 'soft federation' with three local schools. The school roll has declined slightly as is common across most schools locally. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals has risen and is now above the national average.

As a result of the inspection on 23 and 24 September 2009, 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

In 2010 the proportion of students who attained five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics in GCSE examinations rose by 22% and was above the national average. The school's projection for 2011, based upon students' current performance in modular and early entry papers, indicates a further improvement.

The attainment of students on entry to the school varies widely from year to year. Last year, students made better progress in mathematics and English. The improvement in progress has continued but is not as consistent across all subjects and groups. For example, girls' progress improved at a greater rate than boys'. However, evidence from the school tracking data and through lesson observations, indicates overall progress has been strengthened again this year.

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The attendance rate has improved and is currently above average. The number of students who are persistently absent has been significantly reduced as a result of effective new strategies to engage with students and their parents through the work of the newly appointed attendance officer and learning mentor. The school has been particularly successful in its work with Traveller families.

The number of exclusions has been significantly reduced as a result of the introduction of more-effective measures to support students within the school. As reported at the previous inspection, students move around the school sensibly and are courteous. The student council spoke enthusiastically about improvements made to the quality of behaviour since the previous inspection.

The school's specialist sports status continues to make a positive contribution to links with the local community. Although attainment in physical education at the end of Key Stage 4 was below average last year, school data indicate the rate of students' progress is improving.

Lesson observations confirmed the school's self-evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning and that key improvements had been made. For example, assessment and marking have been improved with the result that work is more carefully matched to the learning needs of students in many subjects. There is more-extensive sharing of good practice between teachers and better use of tracking information to identify students whose progress is a cause for concern.

The extent and frequency of monitoring activities to drive improvement have grown. The role of middle leaders has been strengthened. They have been well supported to make a more-effective contribution to school improvement by clearly communicating to staff what is expected of them. There is a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation. The success of targeted actions demonstrates that the school is building capacity across many key aspects of its work. School leaders and governors have a clear view of where further improvement is needed. The school is refining its approach to self-evaluation and improvement planning to ensure targets are equally sharp and measurable across all areas of the school.

The local authority has provided good support as a result of the work of advisers and consultants and through the Gaining Ground initiative.

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

Dr Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



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Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 23 and 24 September 2009.

- Raise attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly in mathematics and English, and improve rates of progress by ensuring that:
 - learning tasks set by teachers are better matched to students' levels of attainment
 - teachers' understanding of best practice in how to assess learning improves
 - teachers' awareness of potential underachievement improves
 - students show greater enthusiasm for learning
 - strategies to reduce exclusions are sharpened
 - levels of attendance improve and the number of persistent absentees is reduced
 - strategies to reduce absence are evaluated effectively.

- Improve the quality of improvement planning by:
 - ensuring success criteria are linked to measurable outcomes for students
 - extending the type and frequency of monitoring activities to make sure staff understand what changes are expected.