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10 June 2011

Mr Frank McCarron
Executive Headteacher
St Damian's RC Science College
Lees Road
Ashton-Under-Lyne
Lancashire
OL6 8BH

Dear Mr McCarron

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Damian's RC Science College

Following my visit with Jean Kendall HMI to your school on 8 and 9 June 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 8 and 9 December 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualifications:

Two newly qualified teachers may be appointed, one in mathematics and one in science. The procedures for their professional development, including school-to-school support, and the quality assurance of their work, are as outlined in the school's detailed induction policy.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Tameside.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 8 and 9 December 2010

- Raise attainment, and accelerate progress, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing the level of challenge in lessons
 - ensuring work in lessons meets all students' needs and especially those who are of middle ability
 - making better use of the good teaching that exists in the college to improve practice more rapidly.
- Strengthen the capacity of leaders to embed and sustain improvements in provision by:
 - reviewing the process of target-setting at whole-college level so that it becomes a more effective tool with which to raise attainment
 - ensuring that managers at all levels rigorously and consistently monitor and evaluate the performance of their teams.
- Improve the effectiveness of engagement with parents and carers.

Special measures: monitoring of St Damian's RC Science College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 June 2011

Evidence

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors scrutinised a range of documents and examined students' work in lessons; 20 part-lessons were seen. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, students, the Chair of the Executive Board of Governors and representatives from the local authority and the diocese. An assembly was observed and informal discussions were held with students around the school and at social times.

Context

Significant changes have occurred since the school was judged to require special measures. The headteacher resigned and an executive headteacher took over the leadership of the school in January 2011 on a temporary basis. He is the substantive headteacher of an outstanding school in a neighbouring local authority within the same diocese. An extensive programme of school-to-school support has been implemented. The school moved into new purpose-built accommodation in May 2011. An Executive Board of Governors has been established to provide strategic leadership of the school. Two teachers have left their posts.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Attainment is rising in both English and mathematics. The school's predicted performance for 2011 and 2012 shows improvement from results secured in 2010 in terms of the proportion of students securing grades A* to C in English and in mathematics and the proportion achieving five good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics. However, despite this improvement, the school's performance in 2011 is still likely to be substantially below its target.

The school has implemented an intervention programme that has accelerated the progress of Year 11 students in English and mathematics, particularly those of middle ability. Students have responded positively to additional lessons and targeted support. There is not secure evidence of progress accelerating consistently in lessons throughout both key stages. Raising attainment has been aided by the school's recent review of its target-setting process, which now enables the adjustment of targets to present more challenge, based on progress measures and set against minimum expected progress. Increasingly rigorous tracking has enabled the identification of underachieving students in relation to these targets.

The redefinition of leaders' roles means that raising achievement is now regarded as everybody's priority.

Other relevant student outcomes

Students and staff report that behaviour has improved considerably since the last inspection. The impressive new school site has boosted students' pride in their environment. Clear protocols have been developed to ensure effective behaviour management, including through the consistent application of routines, which students value. The vast majority of students behave well in lessons, showing respect for their peers and adults. On occasions, low-level disruption interrupts learning in weaker lessons. Students report that incidents of bullying are very rare and are swiftly addressed if they occur. The school has increased opportunities for students to contribute to their school community, including as prefects and councillors.

The effectiveness of provision

The profile of teaching has improved and inspection evidence confirmed the school's evaluation of its quality and its impact on students' progress. The practice of several teachers has improved markedly in response to specific support. Students appreciate that teachers are working hard to make their lessons stimulating and relevant. However, there is still some inadequate teaching. The school's comprehensive monitoring records indicate that too much teaching is no better than satisfactory and this prevents learning from being fully accelerated. Good lessons are characterised by pace and challenge but, in some, the learning objectives are set too low and have a limiting effect on progress. There are good structures now in place to secure consistent lesson planning, independent activity and peer assessment. In the best lessons, teachers use varied questioning techniques to ensure the engagement and participation of all students. Their questions form the basis of lively learning dialogues in which students are required to comment constructively on each other's responses. In satisfactory lessons, there is an over-reliance on students volunteering answers and sometimes insufficient attention is paid to developing their explanations in depth.

The school has worked hard since January to boost the progress of middle ability students, especially in mathematics and English, through targeted booster classes, additional lessons and coursework support. However, work in lessons across subjects and across the full age range is not consistently specifically linked to the assessment of students' knowledge, skills and understanding. Lesson planning lacks detail with regard to the needs of students of differing prior attainment, those identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are gifted or talented. In some lessons, students are given considerable guidance, aids and prompts, particularly when they are completing extended writing. Sometimes this is appropriate but it is difficult to gauge how well students would understand the tasks if they worked entirely independently. The quality of marking has improved considerably since the previous inspection. In discussion, students commented that the feedback they receive has improved strongly and is now very helpful. Marking in English is particularly effective, providing consistently effective praise, guidance and advice for improvement. High quality training and bespoke support have ensured that there is an

increased proportion of good teaching. Teachers are increasingly involved in sharing best practice through the delivery of in-service training sessions and through subject leaders having a clearly defined role in monitoring teaching and learning. There is scope for further sharing of good practice by making use of models of effective subject leadership as developed in English and mathematics.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment, and accelerate progress, particularly in English and mathematics – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher joined the school in January 2011 and continues to lead an outstanding school in a neighbouring local authority. His time is divided between the two schools, with the larger proportion of it in St Damian's, at least until January 2012. His impact has been recognised and welcomed by staff and students; he has raised staff morale and secured improvement during a period of considerable turbulence. He has also nurtured and empowered the school's senior and middle leaders and enabled them to make a stronger contribution to the school's improvement. Clear protocols have been developed, which staff understand and subscribe to, defining roles and expectations of teachers and leaders. These underpin a rigorous and systematic monitoring programme that enables progress to be objectively evaluated and reported. Underperformance in teaching is now swiftly and assiduously addressed. Leaders at all levels record their actions in detail and are increasingly consistent in their approach to evaluating provision and outcomes. There is some variability in the quality of middle leadership and this is being addressed by the school with the support of the local authority.

The school's improvement planning is ambitious but realistic, focusing on the weaknesses identified at the last inspection but also taking account of broader imperatives, such as the need to develop a more personalised curriculum. School-to-school support has enabled governance to be strengthened through the establishment of an executive board which includes representatives from the local authority and diocese and steers the school's improvement. The school, and the partners supporting it, are acutely aware of the need to determine stable future leadership arrangements so that the momentum of improvement is maintained. Governors and leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's performance, based on rigorous self-evaluation.

The establishment of a parents' forum has provided parents and carers with an additional means of voicing and exploring issues pertaining to their children's education. Initial meetings have been positively received by participants. A communication audit has been undertaken and the school's complaints policy has been revised. Complaints are more swiftly addressed and patterns of complaint are analysed. The school's website has not been developed, so immediate access to a full range of information is not immediately available to the community.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen the capacity of leaders to embed and sustain improvements in provision – satisfactory
- Improve the effectiveness of engagement with parents and carers – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action has been judged fit for purpose. The support plan is comprehensive, identifying success criteria and milestones, together with focused support, by which the local authority can evaluate the school's progress. The school confirms that the work of the local authority, including support for addressing personnel issues, is helping it to maintain its focus on improvement. The good support provided by the teaching and learning consultant, complemented by support from the partner school, has helped to increase the proportion of good teaching and reduce that which is inadequate. The School Improvement Officer has a pivotal role in the school's development and the strong partnership between local authority, diocese and the governing bodies of the two partner schools has enabled creative thinking with regard to leadership.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers plan to meet the needs of the range of students within their classes.
- Develop teachers' questioning skills to enhance students' participation and reasoning in lessons.