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13 July 2011

Mr C Smith
Headteacher
St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College
Little Chell Lane
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST6 6LZ

Dear Mr Smith,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Peter McKay and I inspected your school on 12 July 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also thank the students, members of the governing body and staff for the time they gave to meeting with us.

Since the last inspection, a new senior leader took up post with responsibility for the school's arts specialism. The school is about to embark on a major new build.

As a result of the inspection on 11 Nov 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.

Since the last inspection attainment at Key Stage 4 has risen significantly. Results in 2010 for five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, improved twenty three percentage points. Attainment is high in comparison with national averages. All students made good progress and some made outstanding progress. For example, girls, students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made outstanding progress. The school's success is also reflected in subjects such as science, religious studies and design and technology. The school's robust monitoring system shows that students in Year 11 are on track to continue the improvements made in relation to progress and attainment. The school has already obtained positive examination results for early entry in mathematics. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm that students have very good attitudes to, and enjoy their learning. A good deal of work has taken place over the past two years to improve the performance of

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

students, using strategies such as 'assertive mentoring'. This is where all students in Year 11 have a staff mentor who both challenges and supports students to do their best.

Outcomes in the sixth form have fluctuated but show some recent improvement. The progress made by students given their starting points is variable with pockets of underachievement. Not all students make the expected progress. There is excellent retention of students in the sixth form with increasingly more going onto higher education. The school recognises the improvement in the sixth form needs to be greater and that it does not match the improvements evident in Key Stage 4. The successful strategies, such as assertive mentoring from Key Stage 4, are being used with sixth form students. Current internal tracking data suggests a stronger improvement in outcomes. Longer-term plans to improve the overall effectiveness of the sixth form include an establishment of a collaborative sixth form with other local schools.

The school's religious ethos, its emphasis on respect and tolerance ensure that good relationships exist in the school. In addition, the school's specialist status as an arts college is a major contributing factor to its improving performance. Attainment in the specialist subjects has contributed significantly to the overall improvement in examination results. Students have a broad range of activities in which to be involved, from Jazz orchestra, whole-school productions and different dance groups.

There are noticeable improvements in teaching since the last inspection, with more lessons that are good or better. In the best lessons, teachers share statements of what knowledge, understanding and skills students are to acquire and how this builds on previous learning. There are clear criteria by which progress towards learning objectives will be assessed by teachers and/or students. Planning by teachers is based on a secure knowledge of students' capabilities and prior attainment, taking account of any identified gaps or weaknesses in learning. Teaching strategies ensure all students are given tasks, activities, materials or support which are challenging and closely matched to their needs. There are opportunities for peer and self-assessment. Students are well informed through oral and written feedback about their progress towards targets and what they need to do to improve. In some lessons, teachers' planning has too much of a focus on what students will do rather than what they will learn. Occasionally, students do the same tasks or activities, start at the same point and move forward at the same pace. In these lessons, teachers tend to talk for too long and students remain passive. Marking is inconsistent across the school, sometimes it lacks clarity on what students need to do to improve their work and some books have not been marked regularly.

Members of the governing body are playing a greater role in evaluating the school and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have focused their attentions on teaching, and understand the strategies to improve the quality of teaching. The introduction of a new subcommittee on school improvement is allowing the governing body to have a stronger link with senior leaders in monitoring the school's development plan. Members of the governing body have a wide range of involvement in the work of the school. They have challenged senior leaders on the performance of the sixth



form and are involved in strategic developments with Building Schools for the Future, collaboration with partner primary schools and future changes in sixth form provision.

Senior leaders, the governing body and the School Improvement Partner work effectively to ensure the school is moving in the right direction. The school has clearly demonstrated that it is capable of addressing the issues identified in the last inspection. Actions have been decisive, and the effectiveness of the school's work is evident in the improved progress seen in students' attainment.

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

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place 11 Nov 2009

- Increase the effectiveness of teaching so that teaching is good overall and all students make good progress by:
 - ensuring that learning activities match high expectations for students of different abilities through appropriate lesson planning
 - ensuring that throughout lessons teaching enables students' progress to be at least good
 - using assessment data to develop more targeted support for students.

- Improve the capacity of members of the governing body by:
 - more playing a greater role in evaluating school performance
 - acting on evaluations to influence the strategic direction of the school
 - focusing attention on challenging and supporting the school's work to improve the quality of teaching.