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Mr Ejiro Ughwujabo
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic High School
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Dear Mr Ughwujabo

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Catholic High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 15 September 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Could you also convey our thanks to the students we spoke to, the Chair of the Governing Body and the representatives from the local authority and the local diocese.

A new sixth form opened in September 2011; there are 17 students currently in Year 12. Since the last inspection, just under a third of the school's teaching staff are newly appointed. This includes two new assistant headteachers and three heads of department. The school has recently finished the building of a practical centre for design technology and art.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 May 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.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

In 2010, the proportion of students who attained five GCSEs at Grade C or above was lower than that seen nationally. In this year, boys performed better than girls. However, in 2011 there were improvements; for example, the proportion of students who attained five good GCSEs including mathematics and English increased. The school has put in place measures to address underperformance in some subjects, although the performance of boys dipped against that of the girls. Students' performance in mathematics has remained strong. In the stronger lessons seen, students were stretched by challenging tasks, enabling them to achieve well. In a good mathematics lesson, the teacher's use of complex questions resulted in students gaining a thorough understanding of what they had learnt and how to further answer tasks set. However, this level of challenge by teachers is not consistent across lessons. In the best lessons, students were given good opportunities to discuss their work with their peers; this contributed to them making good progress.

Students are of the firm opinion that they feel safe and are well supported by staff. They have noted the improvements in the quality of marked work and the increased use of assessment by staff. Students say they are being given good support in tutorials to improve their performance and to prepare for the transition to the next stage of learning. They welcome opportunities to make a contribution to the school. For example, they have been successful in revising the school uniform for girls and bringing about improvements to the school dinner menu.

The quality of teaching is improving, which in the main is due to the strategies the leadership team has implemented. In the best lessons, students' behaviour and motivation are well managed and teachers have a good knowledge of students' attainment levels to move them on quickly in their learning and to pitch lessons appropriately. Information and communication technology is used well in these lessons. There is good use of probing questions by teachers to gain a clear understanding of how well students are progressing. The impact of the literacy strategy has resulted in some students being given good opportunities to develop their oracy skills. In a few of the weaker lessons, teachers had a tendency to talk for too long, leaving little time for students to work independently. The level of expectation by some teachers was too low, resulting in students having limited challenge in their work, which had a negative impact on their levels of progress and motivation.

There have been sound developments in securing an appropriate literacy and language curriculum. School leaders recognise that improving students' levels of literacy is pivotal to raising their achievement. As a result of observing classroom practices, including learning walks, suitable strategies have been implemented to improve the level of students' oracy skills by identifying opportunities for discussion in lessons. A stronger reading focus is now present in Key Stage 3 and increased support for bilingual students is now available. Leaders recognise that there is a



need to move to the next phase to enable students' improved oracy and reading skills to be used to develop their writing.

The headteacher and his leadership team have acted responsively to implement a clear leadership and management structure across the school. Subject leaders are held to account for their performance and monitoring of students' achievement and the quality of provision is being undertaken regularly. Many well-informed measures have been implemented and there is a clear focus by senior leaders to increase the level of good or better teaching, although some are relatively recent. There is a shared understanding amongst staff of the school's key priorities and the pace required to bring about significant improvement, especially in the quality of teaching. However, the actions implemented are yet to have a significant impact on a few weaker performing subjects and the literacy and language strategy, although improving students' ability to discuss their work is still in its infancy. A more robust procedure to safeguard the school premises is in place. The Chair of the Governing Body is extremely knowledgeable about the school's performance and where the school leaders' efforts should be directed. However, the level of scrutiny provided by the governing body needs to be strengthened in order to hasten actions required to bring about more timely improvements. The local authority has provided focused support which has contributed well to the improvements in the quality of teaching within the school.

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

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the proportion of students, especially of male students, attaining five or more GCSE at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, by December 2010 through:
 - improving the quality of teaching and assessment in weaker subjects and classes, particularly to ensure that work is better matched to students' needs
 - ensuring students receive feedback that enables them to improve
 - developing a literacy strategy and language strategy for students across the curriculum
 - strengthening the monitoring of the quality of teaching, assessment and tutorials by all leaders and managers so that it is more robust and consistent.

- Finalise with the local authority by the end of July 2010 and action swiftly thereafter, appropriate strategies to improve students' safety.