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25 November 2011

Miss Bleasdale
Headteacher
Blessed Trinity RC College
Ormerod Road
Burnley
Lancashire
BB10 3AA

Dear Miss Bleasdale

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Blessed Trinity RC College

Following my visit with Michael McLachlan and Peter McKay, Additional Inspectors, and Ruth James, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 November 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The school, including representatives from the governing body and the local authority, was a participant in a pilot scheme to increase the pace at which schools come out of special measures. An HMI experienced in schools causing concern work, visited the school and discussed the plans that the school and local authority have made to ensure it improves.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2011. 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 not be appointed.

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 Lancashire.

Yours sincerely,

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on June 2011

- Develop and implement a sharp and focused programme to improve the achievement of all students, to include:
 - clear, appropriate and ambitious targets for each student, carefully explained to them and their parents or carers
 - systematic evaluation of progress data so that strategic action can quickly be taken when groups of students, such as boys, do not make appropriate progress
 - intervention to address any gaps in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology that might restrict students' progress.

- Implement as a matter of urgency, a concerted and whole-school programme to improve behaviour in lessons and around the school, so that learning can proceed effectively for all students.

- Develop a whole-school teaching and learning strategy to increase the proportion of teaching which is good and outstanding, through:
 - greater precision in the framing of learning objectives to enable students to understand more clearly what they need to learn, and that relate more precisely to their prior attainment
 - planning that includes a range of tasks and activities in each lesson to suit the abilities and learning styles of all students
 - using more active learning approaches, so that students are able to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

- Improve the strategic leadership of the college by ensuring that:
 - self-evaluation is accurate, analytical and thorough
 - strategic development planning clearly identifies the college's key priorities, in order to direct the energy of all staff most effectively
 - action plans are precise, time-limited, evaluated and effective
 - the strategic plan is regularly reviewed and updated in the light of progress
 - senior leaders and the governing body communicate regularly with parents and carers, and systematically seek and act upon their views
 - the governing body maintains a clear view of the performance of the school and effectively holds leaders and managers to account.

Special measures: monitoring of Blessed Trinity RC College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 November 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed 38 parts of lessons, two of which were jointly observed with staff from the school. Two learning walks consisting of shorter visits to a series of lessons were conducted with senior staff from the school. Inspectors visited an assembly, scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school and held meetings with groups of staff, students and governors. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority and a check was made of the school's documentation in relation to safer recruitment.

Context

Since the last inspection, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body have changed and one senior management position has been created to lead on teaching and learning. There have been two changes to middle leadership roles. By the end of August 2011, 17 had staff left the school and 10 had joined.

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

Unvalidated data confirm that students did not achieve as well as they should in summer 2011. Although some attainment measures rose slightly, there was a decline in the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. Less than half of all Year 11 students reached this benchmark, which was significantly below both the national average and the school's own target for this measure. There was considerable variation in performance and the majority of subjects missed their targets. Achievement in mathematics was significantly below expectations given students' starting points. Results from modular examinations taken by students currently in Year 11 indicate that little improvement is predicted for students in Year 11 in mathematics.

The school has achieved a measure of success in raising the profile of subject targets with students and their families. A presentation evening for parents and carers on target setting, assessment and reporting was attended by over 100 parents and carers. Students have a greater awareness of their targets and how these are linked to measures of their progress. This is helping to raise the expectations and aspirations of staff and students. However, there is a lack of consistency in the extent to which all targets are sufficiently challenging to more rapidly raise expectations and achievement and a few students say their targets are too low. To address this, the school has introduced 'challenge targets' for those students meeting or exceeding their current targets. However, students are not always clear about the rationale behind these adjustments.

Lesson observations confirm that the quality of learning and progress in lessons remains variable. Students enjoy their lessons and make better progress where tasks promote active participation and where teaching is effective in meeting the needs of all groups of students in the class. Learning slows where teachers direct activities too closely, talk for too long or where tasks fail to capture students' interest and engagement.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- develop and implement a sharp and focused programme to improve the achievement of all students - inadequate

Other relevant student outcomes

Behaviour is improving. In discussion, a majority of students says that the new rules for behaviour in and out of class have led to a significant improvement, 'It's like a completely different school' was a typical comment by a Year 8 student. Recently conducted student and parent and carer questionnaires and some of the school's monitoring data support this view. Students are polite, courteous and helpful; they respond well to visitors around school and in lessons. Movement around the building is considerate and orderly, including in corridors and stairwells. In lessons, most students conduct themselves well and form good working relationships with each other and with adults. However, in some lessons, where teaching does not challenge or involve students sufficiently, too many students are compliant but content to remain largely passive and reluctant to participate.

Fixed-term exclusions have reduced, although the number of referrals to the inclusion centre is similar to that for last year. This reflects teachers' readiness to apply the new system to manage behaviour. Some groups of students, notably boys but also those known to be eligible for free school meals and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are disproportionately represented in referrals to the inclusion centre. There remain a small number of students whose persistent misbehaviour continues to present a challenge for school staff. The school continues to work hard to promote the benefits of good attendance. As a result, attendance levels are high and there is a trend of further improvement. The number of students persistently absent from school is below the national average and at the average for similar schools.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- implement as a matter of urgency, a concerted and whole-school programme to improve behaviour in lessons and around the school, so that learning can proceed effectively for all students - satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

Learning and progress were no better than satisfactory in around two-thirds of lessons seen by inspectors during the visit, although students report that lessons are now more engaging and purposeful than at the time of the last inspection. A whole-school focus on identifying learning objectives and assessment outcomes in lessons has been largely successful in

ensuring consistency across the school. The impact of this approach is, however, more variable. This is because not all teaching is effective in using learning objectives to raise expectations and improve students' learning. In many lessons, objectives are too complex, are poorly matched to students' prior attainment or do not identify clearly how learning will be developed to enable students to meet their target grades or levels. As a result, the pace of learning slows, particularly where all students in the class work at the same rate through the same activities. A significant consequence of this is that opportunities for more-able students to access tasks and activities more appropriate to their needs and abilities are greatly restricted.

A common format for lesson design is effective in promoting the use of a greater range of tasks and activities for students. In the best lessons, teachers use this approach to plan lessons that promote independent and active learning, develop paired and small group work and provide more opportunities for students to develop research skills. However, where learning is less effective, teachers do too much thinking for the students or spend too much time describing and explaining what will happen in the lesson for students to have enough opportunity to tackle activities in sufficient depth. The quality of written feedback to students is variable. In the best examples, feedback guides students clearly in the specific aspects needed to improve their work and reach their target grade. In less effective marking, feedback is of a more general nature that does not identify clearly those aspects which require improvement.

Improvements to provision in science have ensured that there is a better match of the curriculum offer to students' needs and abilities, particularly for those students on separate science courses in Key Stage 4. Work to ensure a coherent programme of intervention and support for students at risk of underachievement, particularly in Year 11 and in mathematics, is less well established. Similarly, although a programme of mentoring support is in place for a targeted group of Year 11 students, the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with that of their peers because only a small minority of teaching identifies clearly how learning will be adapted to meet their needs.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- develop a whole-school teaching and learning strategy to increase the proportion of teaching which is good and outstanding - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The governing body, and leaders and managers in school, have moved with determination to secure improvements in provision since the time of the last inspection. Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders has ensured that strategies to improve students' behaviour have widespread support. Structures to enable a standardised approach to the monitoring of provision are now in place and there is some evidence of effective self-evaluation. Strategic planning identifies an appropriate range of priorities, although there remains considerable variation in the extent to which action planning is sharply informed by a rigorous analysis of

recent outcomes. In particular, action planning in some subject areas does not identify clearly what will be done to improve outcomes in the short and medium term. As a result, planning does not focus with sufficient urgency on the need to raise levels of attainment for students currently in Year 11. It does not identify clearly specific actions and interventions needed to bring about more rapid improvement.

Systems to track progress and highlight those students who are underachieving against their targets are now in place. However, there is considerable variation in the effectiveness of many subject departments to accurately track and predict outcomes at Key Stage 4 and there is little evidence that the school has successfully addressed this issue. This, combined with a lack of urgency in the collection of up-to-date assessment information for all year groups, indicates there are weaknesses in the school's systems for identifying and addressing underachievement more promptly, particularly for students currently in Year 11. As a result, the school is unable to identify clearly the impact of actions it has taken on outcomes and to target its intervention work more intensively where it is needed.

Professional development opportunities have increased the use of teaching strategies that help to accelerate students' learning, although the monitoring of teaching does not lead to more precise action plans for individual teachers to help them to improve. There is greater understanding of the responsibility of leaders and managers at all levels for students' progress. Lines of accountability have been strengthened and clarified and improved support has been provided for middle leaders to carry out their roles more effectively. The quality and frequency of communication with parents and carers is much improved; the governing body have a higher profile in school and the role of the link governor to subject departments is helping to more accurately monitor and challenge performance.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the strategic leadership of the college - satisfactory

External support

The school, including representatives from the governing body and the local authority, was a participant in a pilot scheme to increase the pace at which schools come out of special measures. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors, experienced in schools causing concern work, visited the school and discussed the plans that the school and local authority have made to ensure it improves. The local authority statement of action was evaluated by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and judged to be fit for purpose. Since the time of the last inspection, the local authority has provided good support for developing structures to improve leadership and management, in support of school self-evaluation and for teaching and learning. Advisory support has improved provision in mathematics and in English and the school has benefitted from the work of a behaviour consultant.