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Mrs J McGuirk
Principal
John Henry Newman Catholic College
Chelmsley Road
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Dear Mrs McGuirk

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of John Henry Newman Catholic College

Following my visit with David Muir, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 9–10 May 2012, 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 a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, nominated staff, groups of students, members of the governing body, the executive principal who also represented the sponsors, and a representative of the Diocesan School Commission. HMI observed 27 lessons all delivered by different staff.

Context

John Henry Newman Catholic College opened in January 2011 following the closure of its predecessor school, which was in special measures. The majority of the staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy. Bishop Challoner Catholic College, the sponsor, supported the academy transition process and a significant proportion of the governing body are also experienced governors from the sponsor. The Principal of the sponsor institution became Executive Principal of John Henry

Newman Catholic College on 1 January 2011. Seven staff from the sponsor college were seconded to senior positions at John Henry Newman, some on an interim basis. A new Principal took up post on 1 September 2011 and four other staff, including the head of English, the head of mathematics, and a special educational needs coordinator have recently been appointed. In addition, 16 new appointments have been confirmed for September 2012; 19 staff have left the academy since its formation or have tendered their resignation. The academy employs staff from the Teach First and Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP).

The academy is similar in size to the average secondary school, with a growing sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is nearly double the national average. Most students are White British and the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is average, although the proportion speaking English as an additional language is low. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is nearly double the national average. Most students come from the immediate locality, although a significant number travel from surrounding areas of Birmingham.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

In 2011, 57% of students secured five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, which is 57%, was in line with the national average, and notably higher than that secured by the predecessor school. Early examination results for 2012 are conspicuously better than those of previous years and the proportion of students making the expected progress in English and mathematics is continuing the notable improvement secured in 2011. The trend of improvement evident in all of the academy's examination data is directly attributable to the improvements secured in teaching. The 2011 sixth form results were broadly similar to national data with some students on vocational courses achieving well.

Recent changes to the support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs have resulted in the earlier identification of students who may have a barrier to learning. This has allowed strategies to be identified and implemented to support learning. Students who have been targeted for additional support talk about the impact of this work on their learning and progress. Work scrutinies were a feature of all lesson observations and these revealed that the work to improve the accurate use of subject vocabulary was helping students to make better progress.

The academy has recently opened the Rainbow Centre, to provide support for students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Students are very positive about the support they are receiving from the centre and strong relationships have already been established with outside providers to enhance the impact on student progress.

The quality of teaching

The academy has made impressive gains in the overall quality of teaching. Senior leaders identified areas of weaknesses and appropriate training has been provided. This has resulted in strongly focussed teaching which now ensures that individual students are having their needs and interests met across the curriculum. Planning for lessons shows a clear awareness of the levels at which students are working and in the majority of lessons, this information is used effectively to provide a range of appropriate activities and tasks to support learning for all students.

In the most successful lessons, teachers sustain a good pace and use imaginative activities that are varied and engage students. In an outstanding Year 9 English lesson, the teacher skilfully drew parallels between the film *Twilight* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Students displayed an impressive knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's text and the teacher encouraged competitive responses that were respectfully received by their peers. Outstanding teaching was also seen in history, dance and religious education.

Three quarters of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better. In these lessons, teachers plan in detail and make lesson objectives clear and precise, often setting different expectations for students based on their different starting points. Teachers use questions extremely skilfully to extend students' answers and to prompt them to think and explain their ideas. Subject vocabulary is emphasised and reinforced through the use of specialised terms. In these effective lessons, the improved behaviour of the students contributes positively to the rising standards and rate of progress. Effective lessons drew strong social, moral and cultural connections that helped engage the students' attention.

Where teaching was less effective, the pace was too slow and the lessons failed to provide appropriate challenge, so that individuals or groups of students found the work too easy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There are impressive new systems to address the previously unacceptable low attendance. Although attendance remains a cause for concern, there is a clear trend of significant improvement. This improvement is the result of a combination of different strategies. These include rigorous monitoring of attendance, with clear systems and protocols, and improved communication routes with parents of students who are poor attenders. The academy also takes direct action to ensure that students' attendance improves, including the use of a minibus to collect those who are regularly absent. There are also strong links with external agencies to support the academy's efforts to improve attendance. However, the most compelling factor is that students now enjoy their lessons and are keen to attend.

Behaviour has improved significantly, both in lessons and around the college. Students say that this is due to clear expectations and consistent enforcement of school rules; the number of incidents leading to exclusions is declining rapidly. Students attribute this improvement to the Principal's high expectations and the consistency with which staff manage behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Much has been achieved in the academy's first 16 months. The Principal and senior team have embedded ambition and driven improvement relentlessly; the challenge they have accepted is significant but so is the progress secured to date. The academy's self-evaluation is precise and decisions are well thought through. An effective range of coaching and mentoring programmes, well supported by the sponsor college, has been important to the improvements secured in teaching and learning.

The senior leadership team worked alongside HMI in the joint evaluation of teaching and the views they expressed consistently matched the judgements given by HMI. The college's monitoring of teaching is a very robust process, with a strong developmental focus.

The strength of the governing body and the working relationship between it and the senior team and the Executive Principal has been the key to the progress made. Good appointments, careful planning and plain speaking have each had a positive impact on raising standards.

Curriculum revision has been well thought through but rapidly introduced, so that a positive impact on student progress is evident in all subject areas. The academy uses a variety of progress measures effectively but not all of these have clear national comparators. There has been an effective focus on equality of opportunity and the inclusion/intervention programme is clearly having a positive impact on standards and achievement. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.

External support

External support is predominately provided by the sponsor college and to very good effect. The very strong governing body connection and the working relationship between both Catholic colleges has been a significant asset in the drive for high standards.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that attendance reaches the level expected in secondary schools.
- Ensure clarity within the progress measures used to demonstrate that students are making sustained progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, Diocesan School Commission for Birmingham, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector