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Mr M Nugent
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic College
Longton Hall Road
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Staffordshire
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Dear Mr Nugent

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Thomas More Catholic College, Stoke-On-Trent

Following my visit to your school on 17 April 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, a member of the governing body, a group of students, a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of a local school providing school improvement support. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation and systems were reviewed including the system for tracking and monitoring pupil's progress, the revised departmental review process, feedback notes from recent lesson observations and minutes of recent governing body meetings.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement, two additional English teachers and one additional mathematics teacher have been recruited for September 2013. Changes have been made to the structure of leadership in the sixth form and at subject level, with some subjects being reorganised into faculty structures. Planning for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust company in partnership with four local primary schools is well advanced.

Main findings

The school improvement plan has been suitably revised to address areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection report. The plan, which includes a range of appropriate actions for improving the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership, management and governance, includes suitable success criteria and milestones to measure progress. However, an external review of governance has not yet been planned. School leaders are providing some training for the governing body during its regular meetings. There is, as yet, little evidence of governors' involvement, or planned involvement, in evaluating the school's progress to becoming good.

The departmental review process has been revised with more rigour and challenge being introduced. Senior leaders are undertaking more regular learning walks that are informing the professional development opportunities planned to improve the quality of teaching. Good links with two Teaching Schools provide teachers with access to suitable courses to improve their performance, whether their teaching currently requires improvement or is already good but could be even better.

Subject leaders and senior leaders have benefited from the training and support provided by partner schools and have sought out examples of best practice in other schools. Revised schemes of work and lesson planning processes have been introduced to improve the quality of teaching and to give more focus to learning. Additional teaching appointments have been made to strengthen provision in the English and mathematics departments.

In a short space of time, revised targets and an improved tracking and monitoring system have been introduced and are being implemented across the school. These developments link well with the performance management system. By introducing much greater levels of accountability to all teachers' and leaders' roles, the new system of tracking and monitoring against targets has the potential to bring about rapid improvement to the progress all students, and individual groups of students, make.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- make sure that the school improvement plan clearly specifies how governors will judge the impact of the school's actions to become good
- work with the local authority or the diocese to undertake an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is drawing very effectively on external support brokered by the local authority. This involves active collaboration with the headteacher and staff of a local school to improve target setting and tracking and monitoring systems. The quality of teaching and learning and provision in the sixth form is benefitting from the school's sixth form partnership with

other local schools. The school is actively involved in sharing good practice in teaching and in leadership and management with local primary schools in the proposed multi-academy trust company. The headteacher's involvement in the Stoke Association of School, College and Academy Leaders provides further opportunities to support and challenge the school's improvement work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent, the Diocese and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector