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Mr Michael McGhee
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McGhee

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Blessed John Henry Newman RC College

Following my visit to the college on 17 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during my visit and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the college's recent section 5 inspection.

This inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the college was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection I held meetings with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, members of the senior leadership team and a representative of the local authority. I also met with the National Leader of Education who is helping you and your colleagues improve the college. I evaluated the college's combined statement of action and improvement plan. I also scrutinised the minutes of various meetings held since the inspection.

Context

Since the previous inspection two teachers have left the college. The local authority arranged for the services of an independent consultant to work with you and your colleagues to produce the combined, post-Ofsted statement of action and college improvement plan. This consultant continues to work with the college and is helping senior leaders improve the quality of teaching and learning. A group of key stakeholders called the 'core group' has been put together to monitor the progress the college is making towards achieving its targets in the combined plan. The membership of this group includes the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, a representative of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford and the National Leader of Education currently working with the leadership team.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and governors accept the findings of the recent inspection and agree that the areas for improvement are the right ones for the college. They view the report as providing an accurate picture of the college at the time of the inspection and have grasped the opportunities afforded by it to drive forward their plans for improvement.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities have been reviewed so that they are aligned to the college's improvement priorities. These include:

- focusing on the progress students make from the time they enter Year 7 to the end of Year 11
- making sure that all teaching is good or better in order to speed up students' progress and improve their examination results
- making sure that all subjects make a contribution to the development of students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills
- reviewing the curriculum to determine how well it meets the needs and aspirations of all students and prepares them well for the next stage
- improving leadership and management to make sure that improvements are made quickly and are sustainable.

Senior leaders are being supported well by a National Leader of Education and her deputy, from a local national support school. Together they are working effectively to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The behaviour policy has been reviewed and there is now a much greater emphasis on rewards; giving due recognition to the vast majority of students who conform to the college's code of behaviour, come to college every day and work hard in lessons. The aim is to establish a culture of high expectations for all students about how they should conduct themselves in and around the college. There are already signs that this change in emphasis is having a positive impact on the way students behave.

The system for setting achievement targets has been revised and students are given challenging targets in all of their subjects. Students' progress against these targets is carefully monitored. Consequently, teachers are able to identify quickly those students who are underperforming and put in place appropriate help to enable them to get back on track. However, it is too early to assess the impact this system is having on students' outcomes.

Leaders' and managers' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is now much more robust. Senior leaders are keeping a close eye on the standard of teaching across the college and have been trained to assess its quality accurately. Those teachers identified as requiring help to improve their practice are receiving additional support and training. All other teachers are working together in small groups to plan lessons together, observe each other teach and then discuss what they have learned from each other about what works best in the classroom. These developments are encouraging and the early signs are that the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. Senior leaders have also reviewed the college's marking policy and have set minimum expectations for how students' work must be marked and how often.

The college's governing body is clear which aspects of the college's work need to improve and the urgency with which improvements need to be made. They are represented on the core group and so have direct involvement in monitoring the progress being made against each of the targets in the combined plan. Governors have yet to undergo an external review of their practice as indicated in the inspection report. However, the local authority has this in hand and the review is due to take place in the near future.

The combined post-Ofsted action plan and college development plan is well-written with clear priorities, underpinned by a sequence of actions to deliver improvements. However, how these actions relate to each of the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report could be clearer. In addition, how the college intends to keep parents informed about the college's progress needs to be more explicit.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The college's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Oldham and the Director of Education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector