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Brendan Hickey
Executive Headteacher
St Philip Howard Catholic School
St Mary's Road
SK13 8DR

Dear Mr Hickey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Philip Howard Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 10 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report my findings. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement in 12 December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, some senior leaders and some groups of students. I discussed the school with a representative of the local authority and visited a number of lessons to look at learning and students' work. I also looked at the school's attendance and progress data.

Context

Since July 2013, the headteacher has been absent from the school with the approval of the governing body. At the same time, the governing body has set up an urgent working group to review leadership at the school and has made a number of interim changes. The deputy headteacher has assumed extra responsibilities and from October 2013, an executive headteacher, who is currently headteacher at St Thomas Moore Catholic High School in Buxton, has been appointed. Internal staff changes have been made to provide additional senior leadership capacity. The head of the English department retired at the end of the year, but the school was unable to

recruit a replacement of the right quality. As a result, at present the former head of department is continuing to support the department part-time, on a non-teaching basis, whilst the school begins the recruitment process again.

Four other teachers have left the school and five full time staff have been appointed. There have been a number of other changes to working time and responsibilities and temporary arrangements have been made to cover the maternity leave of two teachers.

Main findings

Examination results in 2013 show some improvement over recent years, but the progress that students have made from their starting points in Year 7 is still too variable. Although better in mathematics than English, a smaller proportion of students at St Philip Howard make better than expected progress than is the case in most schools. The attendance of students in the last academic year was below the national average for secondary schools and a greater proportion of students had persistently poor attendance than in most schools.

Despite taking some prompt action to ensure continuity of leadership during the headteacher's absence, the governing body has been slow to reform itself to address the needs of the school better, and is not yet ready to provide the level of challenge and support that the school requires. The upheaval in senior leadership entailed by the headteacher's absence has also created an obstacle to the clarity of purpose and vision required for the school to become good in the time available before the next inspection. There are very recent signs that the executive headteacher has been able to provide some reassurance, but it is too soon to assess his impact.

At present, the way in which the school sets academic targets for students is not challenging enough to be sure that the school will be able to demonstrate good achievement at its next inspection. The school's systems for the close tracking of students' progress are not good enough to enable leaders and teachers to take quick and effective action when students fall behind. The new school year has begun with some greater clarity about how leaders will check on the quality of teaching, but again, it is too early to be able to assess the impact of this and of any follow-up training and development activities.

The discussions held with students indicated some evidence for inconsistency in the way that teachers manage a small amount of poor behaviour. Observations of learning showed some excellent lessons, where students were engaged in interesting activities and were making good progress. The discussions with students, however, indicated that this too is variable. Work is not always matched closely enough to the needs and abilities of students, and so not all make good progress. The 2013 examination results confirmed this, showing that not enough students made better than average progress compared to other schools. The school's actions

to reduce absence have not yet been sufficiently effective to raise attendance levels to the national average.

My judgement at this stage, is that senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided some clear and decisive support and direction for the school during the current disturbance in senior leadership. Its brokerage of the executive headteacher role has been critical. In addition the local authority has arranged for a leadership consultant (funded by the Diocese of Nottingham) to provide urgent additional support for the school. Further plans are in place to support the development of the governing body, and governors have asked for an external review of governance so that they are better equipped to deal with the challenges ahead.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire County Council and the Diocese of Nottingham.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector