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4 October 2013

Mrs C Hamilton
Headteacher
St Edmund's Catholic School
Old Charlton Road
Dover
CT16 2QB

Dear Mrs Hamilton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Edmund's Catholic School

Following my visit with Clare Gillies, Additional inspector, and Hugh Betterton, Additional inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Education Funding Agency, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Robert Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

Eradicate inadequate teaching and promote high professional standards so that teaching is good or better by January 2014 by:

- raising teachers' expectations of students' capabilities
- using assessment information effectively when planning lessons to ensure that work meets students' needs and is sufficiently challenging
- ensuring that lessons are delivered at a brisk pace and engage students actively in their learning
- ensuring teachers' marking and feedback consistently provide students with good quality advice and guidance so that they can improve their work.

Accelerate students' progress and raise standards by:

- improving the quality of teaching so that teachers ensure that all the different groups of students make consistently good progress in their learning
- raising students' aspirations and teaching them how to learn independently and confidently
- expecting students to be active participants in lessons and judge their own progress
- ensuring that all students have equal access to good teaching and work that meets their specific needs
- ensuring that all students develop the skills in reading, writing and comprehension that are needed to support their learning
- building on improvements to the sixth form so that all sixth form students are enabled to make good or better progress.

Strengthen the capacity of leadership and management at all levels to sustain improvement by:

- undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
- rapidly improving governance so that governors are able to ask challenging questions and hold the school to account for improvements in teaching and students' achievement
- developing appropriate systems and procedures to manage the performance of staff so that all teachers are accountable for improving teaching and learning
- creating an effective and sustainable long-term structure for leadership and management so that the school is led and managed well.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, the head of school, other staff, students, a representative of the local authority, a parent or carer and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. Inspectors observed 23 lessons, some jointly with senior staff. They visited assemblies, looked at students' work and evaluated key documents. They noted parents' and carers' opinions from Parent View, on the Ofsted website.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, a new leadership team has taken over, as part of a formal partnership with another Catholic secondary school. Several of St Edmund's senior staff are employed by the partner school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2013, three quarters of Year 11 students achieved five good GCSE passes, and around half of the year group did this including English and mathematics. These results remain below average but represent a considerable improvement from previous years. However, the positive headlines mask wide variations between subjects. Results in both English and mathematics rose notably, due to better teaching. In some other subjects, including geography, history, physical education, citizenship, religious education and food technology, very few students gained C grades or better.

The school anticipates that students will fare better again this year, but much depends on how quickly the quality of teaching continues to improve. Students achieve well in the better taught lessons, such as a good Year 10 GCSE English lesson, where they discussed knowledgeably key themes from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, such as loneliness, prejudice and friendship. Conversely, in an inadequate Key Stage 3 science lesson, pupils spent too long listening to lengthy explanations by the teacher, and copying from books, learning little.

In the sixth form, results are below average but show some improvement. Students do better at AS level than at A2 level. The retention rate of students continuing subjects into Year 13 is too low. However, the sixth form provision is building the

confidence of some students and raising their aspirations, towards university entrance, for example.

Students' progress is improving, albeit inconsistently, across the school. For instance, in music, the students who take the subject in Key Stage 4 are mainly successful; but the musical learning of students in Key Stage 3 is patchy. Across all subjects, lower-attaining students, including some with special educational needs, are not faring as well as they should. Students who join the school with weak literacy skills do not always catch up as quickly as they need to. There is some evidence that the gap between the attainment of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding and that of their peers is starting to close.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the inspection. There are fewer instances of inadequate teaching and there are more good and even outstanding lessons. Much of the improved teaching is in English and mathematics. In the better lessons, staff engage students actively, provide clear and demanding learning objectives, and use assessment data well to set work which is just at the right level to challenge all students. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, an instructor engaged lower-attaining students very well; she understood exactly where they lacked confidence and by persistent and supportive teaching, enabled the students to surprise themselves by completing algebra problems at a level which could enable them to get a good grade at GCSE.

However, the quality and style of teaching remain very mixed indeed across the school and too much teaching requires improvement, especially in the lower performing subjects. Senior leaders have worked effectively to improve teachers' understanding of what is needed but there are considerable barriers still to overcome. The head of school aptly commented, 'It's all about expectations.'

In the weaker lessons, teachers continue to underestimate or spoon-feed students. In these lessons, work is not set at the right levels to meet students' differing needs. Sometimes, the way that lessons are planned limits the students' learning. In a Year 9 religious education lesson, the teacher spent too long explaining the meaning of stewardship when the students' interested response showed they were ready for a deeper discussion about this considerably sooner.

Teachers are giving students more opportunities to work independently, but too often accept work of low quality, including too much that is poorly or carelessly presented. In a Year 10 GCSE physical education lesson, students planned skills training and fitness routines in small groups. When they carried out these routines on the playground, however, they did not try very hard and did not practise or use the techniques as well as they could. For example, students held hockey sticks in

one hand, rather than two, and did not try their best to throw balls accurately. The teacher accepted this too readily, saying that the students' planning was most important. The narrow focus on this one learning objective reduced students' performance.

Teachers continue to provide too few opportunities for students to use and develop their skills in English language across the curriculum. The timescales for improvement in the school's recently written plan to develop this are too long; more rapid improvement is needed. There are some, albeit inconsistent, examples of good provision for students who speak English as an additional language. These include helpful use of translations from and to the students' first languages. Marking of students' work remains of varied quality and pupils do not always have the time to respond and improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are polite and show respect to each other and to adults. They feel safe and secure in school, show interest in lessons and are ready to learn. However, their behaviour in lessons deteriorates when teachers expect too little of them; at these times, they lose interest and do not bother to give of their best. In some lessons, they are too passive, which again is affected by weaker teaching.

In the summer term, the number of exclusions rose but this has now declined again. Students' attendance this term reaches the average; the school follows up any poor attendance thoroughly.

The attitudes shown by sixth form students are very positive. They are, in many ways, good role models for younger students and there is scope for them to become further involved in the wider life of the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The senior leadership team is cohesive and well organised. Its members understand how the school needs to improve. Their evaluations of how the school is doing are accurate, honest and detailed. The school's action plan is followed closely and is well focused towards removing existing weaknesses. However, it does not show a long-term vision for the school or target quite clearly enough how the actions taken might improve the learning and results for students. Senior staff know that a revised approach to improvement planning will be necessary as the school moves forward.

The school's main management systems are now much better organised. Arrangements for the performance management of staff are appropriately re-established, though are too new to show impact. Senior leaders monitor the quality

of teaching accurately. Coaching programmes to improve teaching make a positive difference, especially where the most intensive support is needed. The curriculum has been sensibly revised. The school gathers accurate and useful data about how well students are progressing across subjects. However, these data are not well enough used by all heads of department and teachers to ensure students are well challenged.

Middle leadership, including that of heads of subjects and year groups, remains very underdeveloped. Middle leaders take too little responsibility for improving teaching and raising expectations. However, they are beginning to develop their roles. The leadership of the sixth form also is improving. Rightly, the school is considering carefully what niche or remit it should fill in the local area, in collaboration with other post-16 providers.

The newly appointed coordinator for special educational needs has in a very short time significantly improved the systems for identifying students' needs and providing for them. The school is aware that the proof of the effectiveness of this work will be in better outcomes for the students and better provision for them in all lessons.

Well led by its Chair, the interim executive board provides good temporary governance. Its members ask astute questions of the school and also provide some expert advice and support to senior leaders. The board checks the school's progress on its action plan usefully but the information it gathers is second hand, provided by senior leaders. Members have insufficient direct involvement in evaluating the school's improvement.

External support

Support and guidance from the local authority are strong and influential. Without becoming over-involved, experienced local authority officers continue to ensure that the school's leadership and governance structure is carefully planned and understood by all parties. This remains important, as the school contemplates academy status. The local authority holds the school robustly to account; and provides useful advice where it is best placed to do so. For example, it is using its local strategic role to help the school consider its options for the development of the sixth form.

The school is also helpfully involved with a teaching school alliance which is about to lead a well-constructed programme of professional development for the school's middle leaders. It is aware it must check the impact of this programme as it goes on, as time is of the essence.