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17 October 2013

Mr G Alexander
Headteacher
Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School
Victoria Road
Acocks Green
B27 7XY

Dear Mr Alexander

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 16 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- accelerate the rate of progress of students in Years 10 and 11, especially in English
- revise the school's data systems so that teachers, school leaders and governors have a clear view of students' attainment and progress
- ensure that all teachers' marking gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work and allows them to reflect and comment on how they can make better progress
- ensure, as a matter of urgency, that the external review of the knowledge, skills and understanding of the governing body is carried out and that governors hold all school leaders in charge of areas of the school's work to account for the progress and attainment of students.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and the senior leadership team to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were held with three members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors, 8 students from Years 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13, a representative of the local authority and an external consultant. I also met with the subject leaders of English, mathematics and science. You showed me around the school and we visited classes in Years 7, 9 and 10 to see the pupils at work in English, mathematics and science. I evaluated the school improvement action plans. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's information about pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation document.

Context

A number of teachers have left the school since the inspection in July 2013 and have been replaced. One member of staff has been given responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the provision for, and the progress of, the more able students.

Main findings

Senior leaders, with the support of the local authority, have implemented a number of actions since the inspection to speed up students' progress and attainment. As a result reasonable progress can be seen in some subjects, particularly in mathematics. However, the latest information shows that across year groups and in a number of subjects, especially in English, students make inadequate progress. Actions in the new improvement plans are clear and appropriate. They address the areas requiring improvement pinpointed by the inspection. However, the actions in these plans are yet to show an impact on student progress and attainment. The recently introduced fortnightly 'core group' meetings, between the heads of English, mathematics and science, are enabling these heads of department to share good practice in the quality of teaching and in leadership and management.

Systems to monitor the progress of students are not clear and do not allow the school leaders, including governors, to accurately evaluate how well students are doing or to measure the impact of interventions put in place to support students falling behind. When asked, not all students are aware of their target grades or what they need to do to improve their work.

Strategies have recently been introduced to improve the quality of teaching. For example, a new marking policy is in place and students say that in some subjects the marking helps them make their work better. However, during our visits to classrooms it was apparent that the quality of marking is inconsistent across subjects and teachers.

Governors meet regularly to discuss the progress and attainment of students. However, governors are not able to ask searching questions of school leaders and do not always fully understand the data that is presented to them.

PROTECT-INSPECTION



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

I will return to the school in early January 2014 to monitor the school's progress.

External support

Light touch support was provided by the local authority before the inspection in July 2013. Support is now more frequent and focused on providing information, advice and guidance on action planning and the use of data. The local authority has identified that it needs to provide further support to the governing body. The school has recently been linked with a local outstanding school but meetings have not yet taken place.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Archdiocese of Birmingham and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector