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24 October 2013

Yvonne Lucey
Principal
Thomas Becket Catholic School
Becket Way
Kettering Road North
Northampton
NN3 6HT

Dear Mrs Lucey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thomas Becket Catholic School

Following my visit with Elizabeth Needham and Isobel Randall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 22 and 23 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 March 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 not appoint 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement improves by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently plan interesting activities and prepare resources that are closely matched to students' differing abilities and needs within their classes
 - training staff to enable them to prepare more suitable work for students who speak English as an additional language, disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - making sure teachers frequently evaluate the rate of progress being made by individual students during a lesson, moving them on with their learning quickly once they show understanding or providing support for those who need it, so that a good pace of learning is maintained, with no wasted time
 - eliminating low-level disruption and poor behaviour
 - ensuring that written marking is followed up with opportunities for students to respond to the advice on how to improve their work by attempting a new challenge or practising skills, to enable them to reach and exceed their targets
 - improving the consistency of teaching and achievement between subjects and in the sixth form.

- Improve leadership and management by building the capacity of subject leaders to enable them to address effectively inconsistencies in teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility and to drive improvement.

- Ensure that the range of subjects offered matches the needs and interests of all groups of students and enables them to achieve.

- Raise attendance by promoting the importance of regular attendance to students and their parents and carers.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other senior leaders and heads of subject areas, three groups of students, members of the governing body, two representatives of the local authority and the Diocesan Commissioner for Schools.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the new Principal has taken up her post with effect from 1 September 2013. A number of middle leaders (heads of subject areas and sixth form) have been seconded to the senior leadership team for one year to strengthen capacity. The two existing Vice Principals have taken on new roles to include the management of teaching and learning, and the position of special educational needs coordinator. The school plans to become an academy in April 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students who reached the end of Key Stage 4 in 2013 joined the school with prior levels of attainment which were well above those of the students of the previous year, but still well below the national average. In 2013, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly, and was above the government's current floor standard which sets the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress. Nevertheless, it remains well below the national average set in 2012. Improvements were made in English and all groups of students made at least expected progress. Progress in mathematics, although better than the previous year, was less strong. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, as well as students entitled to pupil premium make less progress than similar students nationally, although the gaps in attainment between these students and others in the school are narrowing slowly. Some inconsistency in levels of attainment remains across subjects, and students achieve particularly less well in art, geography and French.

Students' achievement in the sixth form is getting closer to the national average. Attainment is higher in English, but particularly weak in sociology and physics.

The quality of teaching

The profile of the quality of teaching in the school made available to the new Principal on her arrival was over-generous. Current information made available to inspectors suggests that around 50% of the teaching in the school is not yet good or better. Inspectors observed teaching which ranged from good to inadequate.

Inspectors usually agreed with senior leaders' judgements when teaching was jointly observed. The small proportion of good teaching that was observed during the inspection was well planned to meet different students' capabilities. More effective teachers provide opportunities for students to be challenged through carefully planned tasks. These teachers check regularly through skilful questioning that students understand what they are being taught. Too much teaching fails to challenge students sufficiently and, therefore, hinders their rate of progress. Although information is made available to all teachers about different groups of students and their expected rates of progress, weaker teachers do not plan tasks which allow all students to flourish. Additionally, too few teachers were seen to be checking on the progress made by different groups of students during the lessons themselves, particularly with regard to higher-attaining students and those students entitled to pupil premium.

The marking of students' work has improved, but there is still too much variation in the quality of marking. Some books seen had not been marked at all, while others contained detailed and supportive marking, which offered helpful next steps comments. Only a small minority of students respond to their teachers' marking, because too few teachers make time available during the lesson for students to reflect on their teachers' comments.

The effectiveness of teaching assistants has not yet been evaluated by the school. Inspectors saw some working well, but they do not always liaise with the classroom teacher in advance of the lesson.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and attitudes in lessons are usually steered by the quality of teaching. Where teaching fails to engage students sufficiently, because planning has not been thought through well enough, they tend to become too passive and lessons can be subject to low-level disruption. Some students told inspectors that teachers do not implement the classroom behaviour sanction system fairly, and that there is too much inconsistency across subjects and sometimes within the same class. Students were always friendly and courteous to inspectors. Those students who met with inspectors were honest and open, aware of the school's inconsistencies and able to offer suggestions for improvement. Students are starting to realise the importance of being punctual to their lessons, which has been helped by the re-introduction of school bells between lessons.

The increased proportion of students being referred to the school's learning recovery provision (the school's arrangements for detentions) reflects teachers' higher expectations of students. However, students' attendance at learning recovery can be delayed by a number of days because of administrative weaknesses in notifying parents and carers. Students who attend learning recovery are not monitored closely

enough to enable the school to identify trends in behaviour. Students told inspectors that they feel their views are being taken more into account than previously, because of the revised student panel arrangements.

The school's records of bullying, and racial and homophobic incidents were previously ineffective in monitoring trends. Racial and homophobic incidents had not been reported to the local authority, which is a requirement. However, key staff are now aware of this requirement, and plans are in place to train one member of staff to record such incidents.

Attendance is steadily improving because holidays during term time are no longer authorised. Lateness to school also has consequences, and the school works more effectively with parents and carers to tackle poor attendance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new Principal has used her first few weeks in the school wisely to evaluate and reflect on the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She has amended the way students' targets are set and these are now directly linked to progress. Teachers' awareness and use of information on students' capabilities has started to improve. The ways teachers gauge students' progress through regular half-termly assessments has improved. One sixth form student told inspectors, 'Now they (the teachers) are acting on the results instead of just noting them.' The Principal has reviewed the current procedures for the performance management of teachers, and delayed any pay increases until a revised policy is ratified by the governing body. The Principal has identified existing flaws in the choice of subjects and qualifications on offer, and changes are being discussed for the next academic year. A programme to develop students' literacy skills in Year 7 has been purchased, but it is too early to assess its impact on improving students' reading ages.

Roles of most of the senior leaders were decided before the arrival of the new Principal and do not always play to strengths. However, areas for professional development have been identified, and some effective training has already taken place. The quality of middle leadership remains inconsistent. However, subject leaders are being provided with more relevant training in order to drive improvement, and they are expected to hold their teams to account for their performance. Improved partnerships exist between the heads of English and mathematics with the aim of sharing good practice and improving outcomes for students. The school does not currently have an accurate way of evaluating its own performance, but has sought support to produce a useful working document.

Teachers who require improvement participate in coaching and mentoring programmes, and most have begun to engage in the process. A recent external

review identified that a few teachers have already shown signs of improvement in the classroom.

Governors have started to become more closely involved in the monitoring of standards, and other aspects related to school improvement by working regularly with the school's senior leaders. They have now produced a useful plan which includes more visits to the school. These visits trigger reports with points for action.

External support

The school's and the Diocese's perception of the local authority is that their monitoring activities replicate those of Ofsted. However, the local authority is training middle leaders to use data more effectively. The school has also used the local authority's human resources support system to deal with sensitive and challenging staffing issues.

The David Ross Education Trust is supporting senior leaders to produce an accurate self-evaluation summary and a revised school action plan. The new Principal has also forged useful links with a local successful school which is helping to build its capacity and share good practice.