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10 December 2013

Mr Michael McGhee  
Headteacher  
Blessed John Henry Newman RC College  
Broadway  
Chadderton  
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Greater Manchester  
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Dear Mr McGhee

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Blessed John Henry Newman RC College**

Following my visit to the college on 9 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during this visit and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the college's most recent monitoring inspection.

My visit was the second monitoring inspection since the college was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The college is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

Yours sincerely,

Charles Lowry

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013**

- Improve teaching and learning, so that all lessons are good or better, by:
  - ensuring that activities in lessons capture students' interest, especially in Years 7 and 8, so that they are keen to learn and there is less low-level disruption;
  - enabling teachers to model, demonstrate and illustrate what they wish students to achieve in lessons in more specific and practical ways;
  - helping teachers to improve their skills, particularly in asking questions in lessons, stating the purpose of activities to pupils clearly, and marking and feedback so students know how to improve.
  
- Raise standards in all subjects, particularly in English and the humanities at Key Stage 3, by:
  - improving support for individual students who need extra help with reading and writing;
  - implementing plans for improving literacy skills for all students in all subjects;
  - teaching students how to write for a wider range of purposes and to extend their writing;
  - giving higher-level, more demanding work to more-able students.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of the college's leaders to carry out more accurate self-assessment, by providing opportunities for leaders and teachers to observe outstanding lessons in a range of other schools, and identify what can be learned for practices in the college.
  
- Increase the capacity of the governing body to hold the college to account more rigorously. An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 December 2013**

### **Evidence**

During my visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the senior leaders responsible for checking students' progress and those responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. I also held a meeting with Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the recently appointed School Achievement Partner. You also gave me the opportunity to hold a discussion with eight Year 11 students. I had a telephone conversation with the National Leader of Education from an outstanding national support school who is working with you to help improve the college. I made a number of short visits to lessons accompanied by a senior leader from another outstanding school who is supporting developments to improve the quality of teaching and learning. I scrutinised the work in students' books, senior leaders' evaluations of the actions being taken to improve the college and the college's examination data for 2013 and progress information for current students. I also checked the college's single central record, which is evidence of the checks made when staff are appointed to ensure their suitability to work with young people.

At this visit I focused on the following aspects of the college's work, all of which relate to the areas for improvement identified at the most recent full inspection:

- the attainment and progress of students
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the accuracy of senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the college is doing
- the work of the governing body and, in particular, their ability to hold leaders and managers robustly to account for the standards achieved by students.

As the sixth form was found to be a strength at the most recent inspection, I did not evaluate the work or standard achieved by students in this area.

### **Context**

Since my most recent visit there have been a number of changes to the college. The subject leader for mathematics left at the end of the summer term, as did a further eight teachers employed on temporary contracts. In September, 22 teachers, including a new head of mathematics, and eight support personnel joined the college staff. Of the teachers who began working at the college at the start of the autumn term, nine are newly qualified and two are undertaking college-based training on the 'Teach First' programme. As a result all teaching positions are currently occupied by subject specialists and consequently recent turbulence in staffing has been addressed. However, a vacancy for a deputy headteacher has yet to be filled. Since September senior leaders have made some changes to the curriculum; global studies are no longer offered in Years 7 and 8 and have been replaced by the separate subjects of history and geography. Students are no longer entered early for GCSE English and mathematics. You and your colleagues are continuing to receive support from senior leaders of two local outstanding schools.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the context of the college and how well it is doing. They have worked hard to unite two diverse school communities into one coherent

body with shared beliefs and a common ethos. You and your colleagues are demonstrating drive and determination to improve the college and are leading a hard working staff to try to make the changes needed.

Senior leaders have taken steps to address the legacy of underachievement. They have abandoned the policy of entering students early for GCSE, recognising that many students before the end of Year 11 are not ready to take these examinations. This was particularly the case for more-able students, many of whom failed to achieve at the highest levels in both English and mathematics. The college is benefitting from the links it has with its two support schools. For example senior leaders from both schools carried out an audit of the quality of provision in English and mathematics. This gave senior leaders a clear understanding of the relative strengths and areas for development in both subject departments, leading to a set of recommendations for improvements which are now being addressed. However, these audits were carried out only recently and so it is too early to assess the impact this work is having on the quality of teaching or students' outcomes.

The strategy for managing teachers' performance is becoming more rigorous, with teachers being held to account for their classroom practice and the achievement of the students they teach. The outcomes of performance management are also being used to determine whether teachers receive a pay rise or not. Senior leaders continue to try and strengthen the link between performance management and driving up standards in the quality of teaching and learning across the college. However, they are experiencing some difficulties in overcoming the entrenched weaker practice of some teachers. Accordingly, teaching quality in a number of subjects is not improving quickly enough to accelerate students' progress.

At the start of the autumn term all students were set targets for achievement in each of their subjects. The intention was that students' progress against each of these targets is checked termly, underperforming students identified and then given extra help to get them back on track. Although the college has taken effective steps to check the reliability of teachers' assessment of students' performance in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4, this is not the case for all subjects. Accordingly, although the current progress data are indicating that students' performance, in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, is better than for a similar period last year, it has to be treated with a degree of caution as its accuracy has not been externally verified.

Governance continues to strengthen and a core group of governors keeps a close eye on the progress the college is making against each of its improvement priorities in the development plan. They recognise, however, that this progress is slowing down and attribute this to too many initiatives being actioned at the same time. This is making it difficult for all the changes to be managed effectively.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The effective support of staff from two outstanding schools is providing extra impetus to the college's drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning. At the time of the inspection, one third of teaching was judged to be good or better, this has now risen to approximately a half. Although this improvement is encouraging, the quality of teaching needs to rise even further if students are to achieve at least in line with national expectations.

- Staff new to the college have undergone a rigorous induction, including training in aspects of effective teaching and learning. This has ensured that they are aware of the college's expectations of their performance and familiarised them with accepted practices and procedures. Senior leaders' observations of these teachers at work are indicating that this training is having a positive impact on their classroom practice.
- Senior leaders have reviewed the curriculum at Key Stage 4. Students now start their GCSE studies in Year 9. The reasoning behind this decision is that students will have an extra year to prepare for their final GCSE examinations with the intention of deepening their subject knowledge and understanding. As this development is new, it is too early to assess the impact it will have on outcomes.
- The college is using, effectively, the extra finance it receives from the pupil catch-up funding to improve the literacy skills of those students who start Year 7 below Level 4 in reading. During the last academic year approximately two thirds of these students exceeded expectations and improved their reading age by more than one year, with just under half of the students improving their reading age by two years.
- Students' behaviour has improved. Relationships between members of the college community are cordial and based upon mutual respect. The college's current behaviour log shows that there has been a significant reduction in the number of reported incidents of poor behaviour, compared to an equivalent period last year.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Prior to this visit, the examination results for the end of Key Stage 4 in 2013 were published. Although the proportion of students who achieved five high grade GCSEs including English and mathematics improved by four percentage points to 56%, students' attainment in mathematics remained significantly below average. This was also the case in history, physical education, electronic products, food technology and social studies.
- Students' progress in mathematics and English has been below the government's minimum expectations for the past two years. Although there was a slight improvement in progress in English in 2013 compared to 2012, the progress made by students in mathematics declined over the same period. The largest gap between expected and actual performance was for higher-ability students in both subjects. For example, in 2013 the progress made by this group in English was 12 percentage points below the national average and 36 percentage points below in mathematics.
- The gap in attainment between students supported by the pupil premium (extra funding the college receives for pupils entitled to free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or who are members of service families) grew from 2012 to 2013. This meant that this group of students left Year 11 about three quarters of one grade behind their peers in English and one grade behind in mathematics. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the reasons for this degree of underperformance. These include weaknesses in the quality of teaching and a legacy of underachievement related to entering students early for GCSE examinations before they were ready. However, their work to address weaknesses in teaching over time, as yet, has not had enough impact. Consequently, too much teaching still requires further improvement.

- The revised marking policy, in place at the time of my previous visit, is not being implemented consistently by all staff. In the best marking, students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Examples of good quality marking were seen in Year 11 English books. However, not all marking is of this standard. Some teachers' comments do not challenge students to reflect on their work and so deepen their understanding. In addition there are too many instances where students fail to follow their teachers' advice and so learn from their mistakes. These inconsistencies in the way students' work is assessed have not been tackled robustly enough by subject leaders so that all marking in the college is brought up to the level of the best.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and the standards achieved by students falls too heavily on the shoulders of senior leaders. Consequently subject leaders are not taking enough responsibility for ensuring the success of students in their subject areas or for driving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. However, you and your colleagues are aware of this and are taking steps to address it.
- The work in students' books indicates that in mathematics assessment data are not always used effectively enough to match learning activities to the needs of students. This leads to a lack of challenge for the most-able. There is also little evidence that students' are being challenged to think hard and deepen their understanding of mathematics by being given opportunities to carry out investigations and apply their knowledge to solving problems set in real-life contexts.

### **External support**

As required at the most recent full inspection, the work of the governing body has been externally reviewed. As a result it is now providing an effective balance between supporting senior leaders as they work to improve the college and holding them to account for the standards achieved by the students. The local authority has an accurate view of the college and is working effectively with governors to monitor the progress that senior leaders are making against each of the targets in the improvement plan. The improvement plan has been revised so that it now includes milestones against which governors can measure the progress being made against each of the priorities for development. However, governors are acutely aware that there is a large number of improvement activities going on at the same time. As a consequence this is slowing the pace of change rather than accelerating it. They intend to address this by working with senior leaders to focus on fewer priorities and, in particular, those that will have the greatest impact on students' outcomes.

The college has formed productive relationships with two local outstanding schools. Senior leaders from both these schools are providing targeted support to help you and your colleagues improve the quality of teaching and help secure improvements in achievement.