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31 January 2014

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 Liz Duffy, Additional inspector, to your school on 29–30 January 2014, 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 third 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection but they must not teach history, geography or physical education.

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, the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Robin 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 third monitoring inspection on 29-30 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders, students, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed lessons, in some cases jointly with senior staff. They observed at break times and as students moved around the school. Inspectors evaluated students' work as well as important documents, such as the school improvement plan, minutes of meetings and information about students' progress.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there has been a change of Chair of the Interim Executive Board. The previous Chair remains a member of the board.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2013, GCSE results improved notably. About half of students gained five good GCSE grades including in English and mathematics. The school's information indicates that this improvement should be sustained in 2014, with the current Year 10 cohort being appropriately targeted to do better still in 2015. In Key Stage 3, underachievement is being tackled much earlier.

The improving overall figures, however, mask several inconsistencies and some continuing underachievement. In some subjects, students do much better than others. In English, there have been significant improvements, especially for students who arrived from primary school with lower results. In a Year 8 lesson, students collected quotes and inferred well when reading *Thursday's Child*. The school is successfully starting to develop a culture of wider reading; more students can read well enough to explore different subjects and, in general, they use their literacy skills increasingly well across the curriculum. Just occasionally, over-complex tasks hinder this. For example, in one subject, students were asked to write a television script to show their work when a more straightforward writing task, requiring simple clear sentences with technical vocabulary, would have been more beneficial. Mathematics outcomes have improved too, although boys outperformed girls in this subject in 2013.

Conversely, GCSE results in geography and history were low compared to many other subjects and there is little evidence of improvement so far this year. In a Year 11 geography lesson observed, students knew their GCSE grade targets but their work in the lesson and their books did not give confidence that these will be reached. In physical education lessons observed, as at the last monitoring visit,

students spent too long standing or sitting around. When students were eventually physically active, their skills, performance and effort were at far too low a level.

In many subjects, the importance of raising expectations in Key Stage 3 has been recognised by staff. There is nevertheless much more to do to improve outcomes to the end of Year 9, especially for boys.

In a complex pattern of student achievement, some groups of students do less well than others. In general, potentially more vulnerable groups do less well than their peers. The gap between the progress of students eligible for pupil premium funding and the others remains too wide. The same is true for students who are disabled or have special educational needs. The new special educational needs coordinator has made some sensible improvements in provision but is not yet able to give a clear overview of how well the students are doing as a result.

In the very small sixth form, students' progress has been too slow and results remain low and are not tracked sharply enough. There have nevertheless been improvements in the expectations of the students; their punctuality and attendance is much better, showing their increasing understanding of taking responsibility and of the skills needed for employment. Senior leaders continue to work with other local providers to seek an appropriate niche for the sixth form.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the last monitoring visit. Students are getting a better deal and are noticing this. A Key Stage 3 religious education lesson observed required improvement but the teacher was progressively developing the teaching techniques shown to him through the school's coaching and training.

Where teaching is good or improving well, teachers give clear explanations and have higher expectations of students. They use the school's improved information about how students are doing to set work at more challenging levels. They motivate the students to work hard and think carefully for themselves, without spoon-feeding. They explain to students verbally and through marking how they can improve their learning and work. Staff members expect the students to respond and to achieve well. Students with particular needs are included well; for instance, in a good food technology lesson, students speaking English as an additional language were enabled to succeed by having photographs shown to them and linking these to key words.

However, these improvements are patchy and inconsistent. Inadequate teaching still remains, especially in weak departments such as physical education and geography. Some common weaknesses in teaching include:

- teachers not checking how well the students understand the subject matter or what is expected of them, before moving on
- teachers not engaging with all students throughout the lesson and not expecting enough of them, and allowing them to have an easy time or 'switch off'
- not challenging all students, especially higher attaining students, sufficiently
- teaching assistants not having a clear enough role in lessons
- some work being left unmarked or the marking not showing students how to do better.

Students value it when teachers are clear about what they need to learn and are 'quirky' and fun. They also note the weaker practice, such as teachers not explaining the task clearly, leaving the students not doing what the teacher wanted.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In lessons, students do what is asked of them by staff. When teachers' expectations are high, therefore, students respond by engaging enthusiastically and constructively with their work. They are considerate, friendly and interested in each other's ideas. When teachers' expectations are lower, students sometimes default to making too little effort.

In discussions with inspectors, students said they felt behaviour around the school has improved 'massively' in recent months under the new leadership. Inspectors saw students consistently behaving happily and responsibly as they moved around the school and in playgrounds. Students who met with inspectors say they feel safe and that bullying is rare and well dealt with. This is confirmed by the school's own well-kept records. Exclusions have reduced considerably. Students feel pride in their school and the smart new uniform, pleased to be out of 'scruffy sweatshirts'. Prefects and sixth form students take seriously their responsibilities as role models for others. Older students helpfully work alongside younger ones and provide them with advice and guidance.

Students' attendance remains a little below average. The school has high expectations of punctuality which are usually met.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders continue to provide purposeful direction, which is well supported by the partnership with St Thomas More School. The school now has well-considered, fully functioning systems for:

- school self-evaluation
- monitoring and improving teaching

- staff performance management
- assessing and recording students' progress
- intervening when students fall too far behind their targets
- ensuring safe student behaviour
- governance, through the interim executive board.

These provide the school with much better capacity to continue to improve and give confidence to staff and students. Staff feel better supported and challenged. School self-evaluation is generally accurate, though evaluations of teaching are occasionally too generous, even though the strengths and weaknesses are correctly identified in individual lessons.

Senior leaders know, from their previous experience elsewhere, what makes for good quality teaching, leadership and curriculum. They have shared this with staff, whose expectations have begun to rise in many areas. A very well-constructed programme of training and development has begun for all middle leaders, led by the Brook Learning Trust. Many subject and year leaders can demonstrate how the training is helping them to improve their work, the teaching in their departments and outcomes for students. However, in some subject departments, rightly identified as causing concern by senior leaders, most notably geography, history and physical education, leadership remains fragile and the quality of teaching and of the curriculum shows little signs of improvement. Senior leaders are aware of this and have started to deal with these and some other weaknesses, but not yet robustly enough. It is important that, as senior leaders introduce and develop new systems, they intervene more quickly to drive change, when the systems are not understood well enough or bringing improvement.

Another example of this is the school's recent employment of primary-trained staff to work with some students needing help with basic skills in English. This is a good idea. However, the teaching, when observed, was slow-paced and the classroom not stimulating. Staff did not model the good, precise language that the students needed. Such matters need to be picked up by senior leaders, and higher expectations established, straight away.

The school has a clear, explicit focus on developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding within its Christian foundation. For example, an informative assembly for Years 10 and 11 students about young carers contained very clear moral and religious messages.

Governance, through the interim executive board, continues to improve. The new Chair of the Interim Executive Board, an experienced local Catholic primary headteacher, brings much valuable insight and experience. This is useful as the school continues to expect eventual academy status. The board's regular monthly meetings are well conducted and focused, as are members' regular visits to the school. Well-organised meeting minutes indicate that board members ask the senior

staff questions about a wide range of important areas though not always in a challenging enough way.

External support

The local authority's support remains very strong. Officers sustain a close strategic view of the school and its moves towards academy status. They monitor and hold the school to account well, and this is much valued by senior leaders and useful to the interim executive board. The local authority has helpfully agreed to work closely alongside the senior team as its members seek to improve monitoring and quick intervention in areas where improvement is insufficient.

Priority for further improvement

Senior leaders should monitor carefully and more closely all school departments, and particular improvement initiatives, to ensure that the expected improvements are taking place; where they are not, senior leaders should intervene immediately to drive the needed improvements.