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Ms Karen Smyth
Headteacher
Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School
Honeysgreen Lane
Liverpool
Merseyside
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Dear Ms Smyth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School, Liverpool

Following my visit to your school on 25 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- undertake an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, to assess how this and other aspects of leadership and governance may be improved
- further improve the quality of teaching and leadership in science.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also conducted a scrutiny of students' work and studied a range of documentation including the report from the review of the mathematics department, undertaken by the local authority, minutes of meetings of the governing body and information on students' progress.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the acting headteacher has been appointed as substantive headteacher. In addition, a teacher, new to the school, has been appointed to take charge of Key Stage 4 mathematics, with effect from next term. Governors have decided to allocate responsibility for oversight of the use of the pupil premium funding to a member of the governing body with financial expertise.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, the governing body has ended many months of uncertainty at leadership level by appointing you, a frank and determined headteacher. You now have the authority to implement the changes necessary in a school that has for some time drifted without clear direction; you have set about the challenge of turning this school around with gusto, passion and verve.

As headteacher, you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have begun to tackle head-on the obstacles that still stand in the way of the school quickly becoming good. The post-inspection action plan is uncomplicated, realistic and appropriate. It should be improved further by breaking down the success criteria into manageable 'chunks' so that it is clear precisely what should have been achieved, and by when, especially in terms of students' progress.

The governing body has gone through a period of change. In response to the inspection, governors have created a mathematics working party to oversee improvements in this subject. Governors spoken to during the visit felt that, in the past, they were not always given accurate information from school leaders regarding students' progress and the use and impact of the pupil premium funding.

The school has improved its procedures for tracking students' progress, providing timely and accurate information that quickly identifies when students fall behind. This information is used to hold teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes and expectations have been raised as to their duty to put things right. Information on students' progress is shared with all relevant parties across the school so that it is now much clearer which students are underachieving and in which subjects. As a result, there is a more cohesive approach to raising achievement. Most staff have responded well to this culture of accountability, although a minority remain reluctant to accept that they have responsibility for the rate of progress students make in their classes.

During my visit, information provided by the school showed that students' progress in English is improving apace. However, students' progress in mathematics still trails behind that in English, which is why senior leaders have acted quickly to strengthen the mathematics team with a new appointment from next term. This teacher will have direct responsibility for improving students' progress in mathematics in Key Stage 4.

School leaders have identified, and have started to tackle, weaknesses in science. Long term sickness has blighted this department and the school has been dependent on a succession of temporary teachers in this subject. Students spoken to during the visit confirmed this view; they are frustrated by the fact that topics are repeated or remain unfinished. This is because leadership in science has not in the past been rigorous in checking up on the

quality of teaching in the department. Since the previous inspection, subject leaders are held to account more effectively, for example by frequent and challenging meetings in which decisions made are recorded and followed up rigorously. However, as these procedures are at the early stages of development they have as yet had limited impact on improving leadership in science.

Students that I spoke to were unanimous in their view that the school has improved since the inspection. They have noticed that their books are marked more frequently and they find it useful that teachers now give them time to act on advice given and improve their work in lessons. They feel that 'things are getting better'; for example, they have noticed that there is less litter and students are more disciplined: as one student commented, 'there's less defiance and no-one is getting away with misbehaviour, even when they try it on.' There was an agreement amongst students that this was because teachers have higher expectations of behaviour than they used to have.

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

External support

School leaders are most appreciative of the intensive support provided by the local authority. Incisive and thorough reviews of the mathematics and science departments have helped the school to determine more precisely what is going wrong; as a result school leaders are in a better position to put things right. The frequent 'Challenge Board' meetings ensure that there is no let-up in the drive to move the school forward. A highly productive link with a local Teaching School, St. John Bosco Arts College, led by a National Leader of Education, has been established. This link has been particularly beneficial in guiding the school in procedures to hold subject leaders to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector