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Mr Peter Lee
Headteacher
Ellesmere Port Catholic High School
Capenhurst Lane
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
CH65 7AQ

Dear Mr Lee

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 27 February 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the headteacher designate, members of the governing body and students. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection the headteacher has confirmed he will be retiring at Easter and a new headteacher has been appointed with effect from the summer

term 2014. A substantial proportion of staff have had their roles and responsibilities redefined so that they are more sharply focused on raising students' achievement.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher designate has proved to be a fount of ideas and inspiration. Her track record in supporting school improvement elsewhere is substantial; the fresh approach she has taken has helped to reinvigorate the school, restoring morale after the inspection and stimulating much-needed change. Despite the fact that she is not yet in post, she has set the wheels very much in motion and the school is steaming ahead. Initiatives that have been tried and tested in other schools have been tailored to suit the needs of the students of Ellesmere Port. The retiring headteacher has also been instrumental in moving the school forward and he has ensured all staff are on board for improvement.

Governors have benefited from the input of a National Leader in Governance who has conducted an external review, as recommended at the previous inspection. This review identified areas of weakness and actions have been outlined to remedy any failings. For example, governors' grasp of information on students' progress was not as sharp as it might be. Therefore, training has been arranged by the local authority in the analysis of such information so that governors will be able to challenge school leaders in a more informed capacity. Governors have already increased their confidence in holding the school to account; for example, they made sure that a health and safety audit was conducted promptly to investigate issues raised during the inspection.

Many systems have already been established to sort out areas of weakness identified at the previous inspection. For example, every member of staff has had to show some demonstrable proof that the quality of their teaching has improved. Senior leaders have dropped into lessons and anecdotal evidence suggests discernible improvements to what is going on in the classroom. This is being followed up shortly with an intensive local authority review, where all members of staff will be observed teaching. Teachers whose teaching has been deemed to be outstanding have delivered training to all staff on how to improve their teaching and weaker teachers have received support of a more bespoke nature. A schedule of 'breakfast meetings' before school holds all members of departments to account for progress in their subject.

The local authority has provided a much better tool for analysing information on students' progress. Furthermore, subject leaders have had training on interpreting this information so that they have a much clearer picture of how students are doing in their subject. This new system allows school leaders to access information on

every student's progress, attendance and targets, quickly. This is helping leaders at all levels to challenge staff rapidly if there is any underperformance. The headteacher designate has set far more challenging targets for improvement that are based on all students making better than expected progress. The realignment of roles and responsibilities of a number of staff has allowed the school to run 'Raising Achievement' programmes for all students in Years 11 and 13. Such initiatives appear to have already had a positive impact as current information indicates that performance in public examinations this year is likely to be an improvement on 2013.

Initiatives to improve attendance have reduced the absence rate but it remains higher than average. Since the previous inspection, all staff have had training in managing behaviour and exclusions are well below what they were this time last year. However, as some poor behaviour was observed during my visit, it is clear that the school is not yet successful in managing misbehaviour effectively.

Students spoken to during the visit praised the recently introduced reward of a school trip at the end of the school year for good attendance. Students also relish taking part in the reinvigorated school council; they spoke enthusiastically to me about their first task, which is to rewrite the school's anti-bullying policy. Students also welcomed the 'three minute bell' which reminds them and their teachers to get to lessons on time. They have noticed that lessons in mathematics are more challenging and teachers now mark their work more regularly. They also appreciate teachers' advice on how to improve and the opportunity in lessons to act on such advice.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose
The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector