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20 March 2014

Mr P Mayland
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic School
Darlaston Lane
Bilston
WV14 7BL

Dear Mr Mayland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Thomas More Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 January 2014. 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:

- ensure that judgements on the quality of teaching are informed by evidence from students' progress and the work in their books
- develop students' literacy skills across all years and subjects by: providing more opportunities for students to write for extended periods of time; and giving students in Years 9, 10 and 11 more opportunities to read in school
- monitor the promotion and development of students' literacy, especially in writing, in subjects other than English
- ensure governors frequently monitor, evaluate and review students' progress in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and geography.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, other school leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were held with the subject leaders of English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and geography, the special educational needs coordinator and a representative of the local authority. I also met with students from Years 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13. I evaluated the school's self-evaluation form and improvement plan. I looked at a range of documents, including the school's information about students' progress and attainment.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the inspection in January 2014.

Main findings

The Headteacher, school leaders and the governing body acted quickly to address the issues for improvement identified in the recent inspection. School leaders are taking appropriate and effective action to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to increase the rate of students' progress. The introduction of the Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) has significantly helped to improve the quality of teaching. Students said that teachers now make it clear what is to be learnt and how they are going to learn it. One student said, 'I am much more confident to say if I do not get the work. We are no longer talked at or expected to copy from text books all the time'. Students said that they now get better feedback that helps them improve their work through the 'Directed Improvement and Reflection Time' (DIRT). As a consequence, school leaders have judged that 82 per cent of teaching is now good or better. However, information provided by the school shows judgements on the quality of teaching is too narrowly focusing on observations in lessons and is not taking into account the less positive data reflecting the progress students are making.

The school has correctly identified that students' literacy skills are a potential barrier to learning and progress. Interventions have been put in place, for example a commercial reading scheme that is used in Years 7 and 8 and a focus on the development of students' writing skills in all year groups and across all subjects. However, the impact of these actions has not been fully evaluated.

School leaders have introduced more frequent checks on students' progress. Meetings between subject leaders and individual teachers to discuss and review this information are more regular. Heads of subject stated that these meetings enable quicker identification of students who are falling behind and earlier intervention to be put in place. As a result, information provided by the school shows that more students are making expected progress in English and mathematics than at the same time in 2013.

Governors meet regularly to discuss the progress the school is making, fully support school leaders and sometimes challenge the judgements they make. They have, for example, questioned the judgements made on the quality of teaching. However, governors have not yet focused specifically on the progress students make in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and geography.

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

The local authority provides appropriate support for the school. They do this through Partnership Review meetings and the moderation of students' grades and levels awarded by teachers and the judgements on the quality of teaching made by senior and subject leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency, the Director of Children's Services for Walsall and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries

Her Majesty's Inspector