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Mr Michael McGhee
Headteacher
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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 31 March 2014, 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 the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since my previous visit.

The inspection was the third 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation and I recommend that the next inspection be a full section 5 reinspection.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- 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 students 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 the most able students.

- Improve the effectiveness of the school'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 school.

- Increase the capacity of the governing body to hold the school 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 third monitoring inspection on 31 March 2014

Evidence

During this visit I met with you and two deputy headteachers. This gave you and your colleagues the opportunity to discuss the changes to the college since my previous visit and the progress you have made against the targets for improvement in the development plan. I also held meetings with the assistant headteachers responsible for achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. I discussed the support the college is receiving from two local outstanding schools with the National Leader of Education and two other representatives of those schools. I took the opportunity to speak with, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a group of Year 11 students and had telephone conversations with representatives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford and Oldham local authority. You accompanied me on a tour of the college where we made a number of short visits to lessons. I scrutinised the work in a sample of students' books to determine the impact of the recently revised marking policy. I reviewed the college's development plan, the current data on achievement at Key Stage 4, the March 2014 report of the review of the mathematics faculty, carried out by staff of the national support school and the local authority's most recent monitoring report. I also scrutinised the college's single central record of the checks made on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

The purpose of my visit was to consider the college's response to the recommendations made in my most recent report and specifically:

- the impact of senior leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- the action taken by senior leaders to involve middle leaders, particularly teachers with subject responsibility, in monitoring and evaluating the work of their faculties
- the quality of the revised development plan and the progress being made against each of the targets in it
- students' progress at Key Stage 4 and in particular their progress in English and mathematics
- the standard of marking in students' books and the impact of the college's revised marking policy on the quality of feedback received by students.

Context

Since my previous visit there have been a number changes to the college's staffing structure. The governing body has appointed an additional deputy headteacher and an additional assistant headteacher to the senior team. The leadership of the English faculty has been strengthened by the appointment of two assistant directors. These are temporary appointments that are being filled by teachers who are already employed by the college.

Two teachers of mathematics are due to leave the college at Easter. The governing body has filled the resulting vacancies. The new appointments, who will take up their posts at the start of the summer term, will have subject responsibilities in the mathematics faculty as assistant directors.

From September, two newly qualified teachers will join the staff, one to work in the English faculty and the other in mathematics. Also in September, two trainee teachers will start their training at the college; one is a subject specialist in English and the other in mathematics.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and governors have worked hard to address the areas of concern identified at my previous visit. They have refined the college's development plan and it is now much sharper. The number of improvement priorities in it has been reduced with only those that are intended to have the greatest impact on students' achievement being retained. As a result, there is now much greater clarity, for all stakeholders, as to what the key priorities are; with all coming under the umbrella of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staffs' energies are now being directed, effectively, towards implementing activities that will have the greatest impact on students' outcomes. The refined plan also includes appropriate milestones against which governors can assess the progress being made against each of the priorities. Consequently, they are able to hold you and your colleagues robustly to account for the effectiveness of your actions. However, governors are aware that the pace of change has only recently begun to accelerate and that the speed of development needs to be maintained in order to overcome the legacy of students' underperformance.

The senior leader with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning, working with a colleague from one of your support schools, has recently introduced a system for collecting evidence on the quality of teachers' practice and assessing its impact. Directors of faculty now have a crucial role in evaluating the quality of provision. They regularly observe their colleagues teaching and together with evidence of the work in students' books and students' progress data have an increasingly reliable picture of what teaching is typically like for students and the impact it is having on their learning. Teachers use evidence from the feedback they receive from these monitoring activities to identify their strengths and work on their areas for development. The college's data is suggesting that this strategy is already bearing fruit, with 70% of teaching in the college good or better. This is a marked improvement on the figure at my last visit, which suggested that just over half of all teaching was at this standard. There is also evidence in the college's Key Stage 4 progress data that these improvements are also having a positive impact on students' progress, particularly in English and mathematics. However, senior leaders are aware that some teaching still requires improvement and that their work to eradicate any remaining pockets of weak teaching must continue apace if all groups of students are to achieve their potential.

Since my last visit, college staff have worked together to revise the college's marking policy. The red, amber, green (RAG) system of marking is now being implemented across the college by all teachers and is understood by the students. This system of marking provides an effective way of informing students what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. In the best examples, teachers provide an incisive analysis of the strengths of a piece of work and the further action the student must take to make it even better; which is then followed up by the student. However, not all marking, as yet, is of this quality. Nevertheless, senior leaders have carried out a detailed evaluation of this relatively new approach to assessing students' work, are aware of its strengths and weaknesses and have in place plans to address them. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this strategy on students' outcomes.

Issues related to the reliability of teachers' assessments of students' performance, identified as an area for concern at my last visit, are continuing to be addressed. Samples of students' work in English and mathematics, assessed by college staff, have been externally validated by subject specialists at both support schools. In addition, this year's mathematics mock

GCSE examination was marked by experienced examiners. These systems for checking the reliability of the college's assessments have led to governors and senior leaders having much greater confidence in the data. The college's data for English are showing that, currently, Year 11 students are making progress above the 2013 national figures; whereas in mathematics students' progress, from each starting point, is broadly in line with them. The college's data also suggests that the attainment gap between students in receipt of the pupil premium (the extra funding the college receives for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or who are children of service personnel) and their peers is closing compared to what it was last year. This represents a substantial improvement in achievement when compared to 2013 and is a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and more effective checking of students' progress. However, although encouraging, these data need to be treated with a degree of caution because they have not been validated nationally and improvements in the quality of teaching have been relatively recent and have yet to show that they can be sustained.

Year 11 students interviewed by me agreed that teachers' expectations of their performance are greater this year than they were previously. The college is providing students with extra support in the form of additional classes and revision packs in order to help them achieve their target grades. As one student said, 'It is not just about getting 'C' grades now. They want us to achieve the best grade we can.'

The unique culture and ethos of the college is continuing to become established. Students are expected to behave well and the college's code of conduct, for example, in relation to standards of uniform, is strictly applied.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Effective training for teachers and support for those colleagues whose classroom practice needs further development is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching and outcomes for students.
- Intensive support for Year 11 students in English and mathematics, including extra classes, regular assessments and targeted teaching to help students fill gaps in their knowledge is leading to accelerated progress in both subjects.
- Students know their targets and as a result of regular assessments are able to describe what they need to do to achieve them. This is certainly the case in English and mathematics.
- Pupil premium funding is being used effectively to improve the literacy skills of students in Year 7. For example, the reading recovery programme is leading to rapid gains in students' reading ages.
- Improved strategies for monitoring and evaluating the work of the college are enabling senior leaders and governors to form an accurate picture of how well the college is doing and to hold staff to account for the quality of their work and the standards achieved by the students.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is evidence of students' targets not being revised to reflect the progress they are making. For example, in one subject a Year 11 student was producing work of GCSE grade A standard but had a target of grade C.
- The approaches being used effectively to improve students' performance in Year 11 are not being rolled out quickly enough across the other year groups in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Consequently, the strategies to overcome the legacy of weaker teaching in the past are not yet having sufficient impact lower down the college.
- Senior leaders continue to receive effective support from their colleagues in the two support schools. However, the level of this support is not allowing governors and the local authority to determine the capacity of senior leaders to drive forward further improvement independently.

External support

Governance continues to strengthen. Governors have acted effectively on the findings of my previous visit and are ensuring that senior leaders' energies are now focused on fewer priorities which relate, specifically, to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Individual governors have been linked with subject faculties, enabling them to provide an effective line of communication between each faculty and the governing body. The National Leader of Education and her colleagues from the two support schools continue to provide effective help to leaders and managers in their drive to improve the college. The local authority school improvement service has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the college and is continuing to monitor the college's progress against its development priorities. This external view of the college is providing an extra layer of information with which governors can hold senior leaders to account.