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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 Brian Oppenheim, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7–8 May 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 fourth 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 continue to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection but, as before, 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 Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 7–8 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders, students, two members of the Interim Executive Board as well as representatives of the archdiocese and the local authority. Inspectors observed several lessons, some jointly with senior staff. They evaluated students' work and documents such as the school improvement plan, minutes of meetings, teachers' lesson plans and information about students' progress.

Context

There have been no major changes in the staffing or structure of the school since the last monitoring visit. The link with St Thomas More School, Greenwich, continues.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievement continues to improve steadily. The school very effectively gathers and analyses information about the progress made by those students taking GCSE and sixth form courses. Senior leaders continue to predict that the notable improvements in GCSE results made in 2013 should be sustained this year, with more students gaining higher grades.

As before, this general improvement masks notable differences between subjects. Students' achievement in history and geography continues to be too low, with their learning too narrow and lacking subject-specific depth. For example, in a Year 10 geography lesson, although students were motivated by purposeful teaching about using case studies, from a teacher who has just taken over this class, they were insufficiently clear about some key differences between tourism in Antarctica and other, more highly visited, places in the world. In a Year 9 history lesson, the teacher showed good subject knowledge about pre-war German life but this did not lead to sufficiently challenging tasks for the students and so their historical thinking was limited. The newly appointed leader for both subjects clearly recognises this problem, and has made sensible early plans to improve the teaching and the curriculum content, so that students will do better.

In English, conversely, students generally progress well, and they are faring better too in mathematics and science. In a Year 11 English lesson, students worked independently and successfully in analysing complex poetry in detail. In a Year 11 science lesson, students showed reasonable knowledge of electrolysis; the teacher picked up gaps in what they knew and used perceptive questioning to help them to make good progress in extending their understanding. Students continue to apply

their literacy skills helpfully in different subjects across the school. The school is increasingly successfully tackling underachievement in English and mathematics in Key Stage 3.

The school's well-kept data also indicate that there continue to be differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils. In particular, there are indications that the progress of girls has increased more rapidly than that of boys and the progress of pupils not eligible for pupil premium funding is improving faster than that of those who are eligible. Thus the gaps between these groups are widening. Students with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, however, achieve about as well as their peers. All this needs to be further confirmed when examination results are known. However, senior leaders are aware that these issues need to be considered more robustly as further improvement work takes place.

In Key Stage 3, the school also gathers data about the progress of students, based on National Curriculum levels. This information is less reliable than that for older students, especially in subjects other than English and mathematics. Staff are asked to make assessments of all students using sub-levels when, in many subjects, these do not exist nationally. The school is aware of this problem and is rightly considering other ways of measuring the progress of younger students. Inspection evidence indicates that students' attainment is often below expectation in lessons even though their progress has improved; the expectations of students remain too low.

In the sixth form, there have been some improvements in the progress of students. However, retention rates are too low. About a third of students drop out. Some students are well prepared for university entrance but the numbers in the sixth form are small.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved further since the last monitoring visit. It is of a more reliable standard across the school; there is far less inadequate practice. Lessons are consistently better organised and teachers usually give clear explanations and instructions. In an excellent GCSE English lesson, for a lower set, students worked hard to identify the key points in a text. The teacher gave powerful, well-informed feedback to individuals and groups to help them think more deeply. The students knew exactly what was expected and were well supported in the task. The work in their books was marked well and they had made much progress over time.

New teachers, including some who are unqualified, are inducted and supported effectively. All teachers continue to develop the techniques and practices which are being encouraged and developed through the programme of staff training and coaching. For example, senior leaders have decided that in all lessons, teachers must share learning objectives with the students. This helps to structure and focus

lessons, avoiding them going off the point and students losing interest. This is one reason why there is much less inadequate teaching. On the other hand, this practice, when used too inflexibly, too often limits the students' learning, as the following example shows.

A Year 8 music lesson was taught in a lively and engaging style. Its objective was to help students to identify the bass line in a reggae song. This was not, in itself, a challenging objective and it was quite easy for students to hear the syncopated bass part. All students were expected to play the bass line on keyboards. This task, as structured, was mechanical; it required little musical understanding and the students had little scope to take their learning further. Opportunities for singing were missed. This exemplifies the scope to improve the Key Stage 3 curriculum and raise the expectations of younger students further.

A very important priority for the school now is to improve the way in which different work is set in lessons to meet the needs of different students. As in the example above, too often all students do essentially the same task. This has the particular effect of underestimating higher-attaining students. One student who met with inspectors correctly pointed out that he was aiming for some A grades at GCSE but the school's targets for him, based on his primary school performance, were only for Cs. In addition, teachers still do not always check in lessons that students have understood and learned what they are supposed to before moving on.

In February, the local authority expertly reviewed the physical education department, following the strong concerns about the quality of teaching in this subject in previous monitoring visits. The review concurred that far too much of the teaching was inadequate, with students too often inactive and expectations of staff too low. Since this review, good support has been provided to the physical education department and there has been some early improvement. In particular, staff are attempting to make students more active throughout lessons. However, there is much more to do. Teachers still too often stop pupils' activity and speak to classes for longer than is necessary. Their expectations of the pupils have risen somewhat but remain too low.

The sixth form teaching observed was effective. However, class sizes are very small and this can limit the quality of the learning and discussion. A sixth form drama student pointed out in a lesson that having only two students in the class limited the number of parts that could be developed in improvisation and other practical work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As at the last visit, students do what is asked or required of them by staff. Therefore, as teaching has continued to improve and more lessons are interesting

and motivating, students' behaviour and attitudes to their learning have also improved. They often work independently and there are fewer instances of students making too little effort.

Students who spoke with inspectors feel safe and are pleased at how well behaviour has improved, as a result of the school's better systems and procedures. The school's records show that incidents of serious misbehaviour are becoming notably fewer. As at the last monitoring visit, students say that bullying is rare but some students pointed out examples of inconsistencies among staff in dealing with reported misbehaviour. 'It depends who you tell,' said one.

Prefects and older students continue to be helpful role models. Students understand the expectations of them. They move round the school sensibly and with good humour and are usually punctual to lessons. Inspectors, however, noted that when students are going to physical education lessons, after changing, their behaviour can deteriorate and some lesson time is wasted.

Students' attendance is improving but remains below average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders provide purposeful, constantly improving leadership, well guided through the link with St Thomas More School. Consequently, the school has clear direction and judiciously chosen priorities. Leaders engage with staff and students productively. They have engaged with many parents and carers. The school evaluates itself honestly and accurately. Senior leaders have correctly ensured, since the previous monitoring visit, that they check more quickly on the school's actions and initiatives, to ensure they are successful. For example, they evaluated quickly interventions provided to students who needed some extra help using suitable software. Pupil premium funding is spent appropriately but its impact needs to be more fully assured.

There is significant impetus towards improving teaching through a programme which is well led by an assistant headteacher. The school's self-evaluation of teaching, in terms of its main strengths and weaknesses, is accurate and evidence is robustly gathered.

Middle leaders, including heads of subject departments, have a much clearer shared sense of purpose, after completion of the first stage of their training led by the Brook Learning Trust. They understand their roles much better and lead some improvement. For example, the head of science has inducted and supported new staff well. The music department also is moving in the right direction. The head of this subject knows the need to develop the curriculum, assessment and teaching in Key Stage 3 to increase ambition for students, as in other subjects. Rightly, he has

invited Soundhub, the Kent music education hub, to work with him on this. It is important that senior leaders also engage with this activity.

There remains, nevertheless, considerable inconsistency in terms of the depth of experience and quality of practice among the middle leaders. Thus, more bespoke training is rightly planned in the forthcoming financial year. Senior leaders line manage departments vigilantly. A different line manager has been assigned to the physical education department, where much work is needed. Performance management for staff is helpful in setting clear targets for middle leaders and other staff to achieve.

Management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved. A wide range of interventions, and better targeting of the work of some teaching assistants, are carefully organised. However, the day-to-day planning of work for students with special educational needs in class lessons continues to require improvement.

The interim executive board is very small. Its four experienced members, nevertheless, work hard to ensure that they govern, challenge and support the school appropriately. They check carefully that the evidence given to them by senior leaders is robust. However, because of their small numbers, they are insufficiently involved in first-hand monitoring of the school improvement plan. There is not yet a clear plan about how governance will develop as the school moves towards the possibility of becoming an academy. It is now important that the many partners involved in this process should as swiftly as possible clarify the route ahead and the timings.

Members of the interim executive board look carefully with senior leaders and others at the school's financial position and its strategic place in the Dover educational community. It has not yet been possible, despite considerable effort, to find a niche for the school's sixth form, working in partnership with other providers. The small class sizes across the sixth form make it difficult to operate cost-effectively.

External support

The local authority continues to provide very strong support. It has usefully helped senior leaders to check the impact of actions more quickly. Its officers monitor the school's progress very well and thus support the work of the interim executive board. The review of physical education was timely. The archdiocese also provides valuable encouragement and strategic support. It is encouraging also to see further local links being developed with other schools and with Soundhub, as mentioned above.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching further by expecting more of students and by providing work in lessons which is better matched to their individual needs.
- Continue to revise the curriculum and assessment systems, especially in Key Stage 3, also to raise expectations and levels of aspiration for students.
- Ensure there is a clear, timed plan showing how the school will take back responsibility for its own governance from the Interim Executive Board, making links, as needed, to any future plans for becoming an academy.