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15 May 2014

Mr Ciran Stapleton  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic High School  
Shaggy Calf Lane  
Slough  
SL2 5HW

Dear Mr Stapleton

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic High School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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:

- ensure that swift action is taken to improve students' levels of literacy by more effective teacher marking and feedback.

### **Evidence**

During my visit, I attended the school's second Strategy Action Group (SAG) meeting with you, the senior leaders and a member of the local authority. This is a group set up to monitor the school's progress and improvement. I also met with representatives of the governing body to review the action taken since the last inspection. The amended school improvement plan was evaluated. In addition, I visited some classrooms with you to look at teaching and learning, and I scrutinised a range of students' books to review marking and feedback. I also examined the school's single central record.

## **Context**

Since the last monitoring visit there have been several staff changes. One deputy headteacher has left the school, and another will leave at the end of this term. The head of mathematics is no longer in post. The school has appointed two temporary mathematics teachers, and there is a new head of mathematics. A new assistant headteacher and deputy headteacher have joined the school, and another assistant headteacher has been seconded to St. Joseph's from a partner school until the end of the summer term. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed.

## **Main findings**

Since the last monitoring visit you have worked with a relentless drive to address the areas for improvement. This has resulted in a rapid change of ethos in the school and a much better understanding by all staff of the urgent need for change.

You have embraced the challenge of ensuring that leadership has the capacity to make this a good school: as a result, the senior leadership team is entirely new. Governors accurately describe the new team as 'dynamic'. Senior leaders have worked well to create robust systems for tracking student progress, and for checking the quality of teaching. These are starting to bear fruit. All teachers now have clear information about how their students are achieving so that they can plan lessons accordingly, using the useful new lesson planning forms. The quality of teaching is starting to improve and this means that students lower down the school are beginning to achieve higher standards. Teachers are clear about your high expectations: their performance targets are now, rightly, closely linked to how much progress their students make.

The school improvement plan has been amended and is now a more precise and useful document. This has made it much easier for governors to check how things are going. You are coming to the end of the first stage of improvement in the school: the right leaders and staff and rigorous systems are in place. A clear plan for the next phase of making this a good school now needs to be written to show how you will make a rapid impact on the pace of students' progress.

Although there has been some focus on teachers' marking and effective feedback to students, this has not yet had a consistent impact. Students' errors in writing, spelling and grammar are not always being corrected in their books. This is a barrier to raising their achievement and needs urgent attention.

As a result of significant additional support, students' achievement in Year 11 looks more promising than last year. Nonetheless, the gap between the progress of those students eligible for additional government funding and their peers appears to be

wider for this year group, despite some initial training undertaken with teachers. Students in the sixth form have made better progress this year, although there is still work to be done on ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessment data. Some initial progress has been made on curriculum development in the sixth form, but there is more to do.

The organisation of the external governing body review has not been swift enough. Although some effective preliminary work has been undertaken the review has not yet been completed. A new and experienced clerk has been appointed and this has helped to sharpen the governors' quality of questioning and challenge to the school in meetings. They now understand clearly how the school needs to improve and are more courageous in supporting you with difficult decisions. For example, governors were highly involved in the appointment of new senior leaders to the school. Governors now have a better understanding of their strategic role and know that they need to evaluate the impact of, for example, the way in which pupil premium funding is spent. The governing body has undertaken a self-evaluation process, and a sensible action plan has been written. Some governor training has taken place; there is still a need for more.

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 external support received by the school has improved significantly. The local authority now holds the school to account robustly through regular SAG meetings. This has resulted in a more focused approach by the new leadership team and has helped you to prioritise and to set up good systems for tracking student progress, for example. Useful visits to other schools have been prompted by the local authority. These have reassured the senior team about the accuracy of their judgments on the quality of teaching. Teachers have also visited other schools and this has helped their understanding of what good teaching looks like.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Slough and the diocese of Northampton.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar

**Her Majesty's Inspector**