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6 June 2014

Mrs Mary Page
Headteacher
St Bernard's Catholic High School
Rating Lane
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA13 9LE

Dear Mrs Page

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Bernard's Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 5 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I conducted a brief tour of the school and held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, two representatives of the local authority, a representative of the Diocese and a group of eight students selected at random from Years 7 to 10. I also had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan. I also examined the single central record of staff and a range of other documentation relating to the monitoring activities that you have conducted since the inspection.

Context

Since the inspection, the number of students at the school has reduced from 956 to 947. Two new teachers of English have been appointed. A new head of English, who will also be an assistant headteacher, takes up post in September 2014. Two new

deputy headteachers, one from within and the other from outside the school, will start their work at the end of this month. The senior leadership has also been restructured and extended.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, the governors and staff accept that the school has serious weaknesses and have a shared determination to ensure that it becomes good by September 2015.

Your action plan focuses appropriately on the areas for improvement identified in the report and you are monitoring its implementation regularly and systematically. We discussed how this process could be helped further by identifying the precise amount of improvement you expect to see at specific points over the next two years. Your most recent evaluations show improvements in the quality of teaching, progress and attainment and a reduction in exclusions, misbehaviour and absences. The students whom I met said that they had seen clear improvements since the inspection, in terms of behaviour in class, the quality of marking, the readiness of teachers to provide additional support to those who are struggling with their work, and the range and variety of activities included in lessons.

You, the governors and senior leaders continue to hold staff rigorously to account for students' progress. Each governor committee has been given responsibility for monitoring progress on a specific aspect of the action plan. As well as receiving reports from senior leaders, the governors are also drawing up a schedule of regular meetings with heads of department, to gain a clearer understanding of what is happening in each area of the curriculum. A regular aspect of the finance committee's work is reviewing what impact the pupil premium expenditure is having on the attainment and progress of the increasing number of students who are entitled to this. The governors have also used reserve funding to tackle the staffing issues in English.

The inspection report commented on how you 'shouldered a considerable workload without personal administrative support'. The governors have now provided you with that administrative support. The restructuring of the senior leadership team, which is now almost complete, will also allow for greater sharing of responsibilities for the day-to-day running of the school.

Before and after the inspection, you and the governors have had to devote a considerable amount of time to bringing about improvements within the English department. You have received considerable support for this from the local authority and external consultants and, from the beginning of the autumn term, you will have a fully-staffed department. However, it will be a considerable challenge to bring about the necessary improvements within the set timescale. You have made considerable efforts to minimise the impact on the current Year 11. However, as you recognise, this means that further work will have to be done with younger students. Most of the students whom I met were still experiencing frequent changes of

teachers in English, as a result of which they were repeating work they had already done and did not feel they were making sufficient progress.

You are making good use of a wide range of well-targeted support from the Local Alliance of System Leadership, the local authority and a range of external consultants.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is also fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria and the Director of the Education Service for the Diocese of Lancaster. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh

Her Majesty's Inspector