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10 July 2014

Mr Paul Hughes
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic College
Ocotal Way
Swindon
SN3 3LR

Dear Mr Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic College

Following my visit with Alan Hinchcliffe, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Raye Allison-Smith, additional inspector, to your college on 8 and 9 July 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 college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 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 college is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The college may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

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 Education Funding Agency; the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education; the Chair of the Governing Body; the Director of Children's Services for Swindon; and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2013

- Quickly eradicate all inadequate teaching and increase the amount of good teaching, by:
 - ensuring that work set and the questions teachers ask engage students of all abilities
 - making sure that teachers know how to support students who speak English as an additional language, and that this knowledge is used effectively in lessons
 - ensuring that students' books are marked regularly and thoroughly, improving the quality of marking, giving feedback to students on how to improve, and allowing them time to make improvements and complete their work to a high standard
 - making sure that all teachers use detailed information about students' past achievements to set high expectations and carefully match work to students' needs and abilities
 - sharing the good and outstanding teaching methods that exist in the college with all teachers so that all students benefit from them.
- Raise standards throughout the college, particularly in English and mathematics, and ensure all students make progress which at least matches national expectations at Key Stage 4, by:
 - ensuring teachers both use the college's systems regularly to monitor students' progress towards challenging targets and use this information effectively so that lessons meets the needs of all students
 - accelerating progress in Key Stage 3 so that students are well prepared for the challenges of GCSE work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance in driving up students' achievement, by:
 - sharpening how leaders and governors use information about students' progress to check whether their actions to improve the school have worked, and to plan appropriate strategies to raise standards
 - ensuring the school's improvement plans reflect a greater sense of urgency in tackling underperformance and clearly identify: who is responsible for monitoring specific actions and how this checking will be done; measurable targets against which progress can be tracked; specific deadlines for reaching these targets; the resources needed to support the college's actions to raise standards; and what will happen if the targets are not met
 - evaluating how well the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up grants are used to raise the standards of students who might not make the progress expected of them

- setting specific, measurable targets with clear deadlines for teachers that enable leaders and governors to hold staff to account more effectively carrying out a review of the sixth form to ensure the curriculum and teaching meet the needs of all students.

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 8 and 9 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, associate leaders, groups of students and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed 27 episodes of teaching, most of which were conducted jointly with leaders from the college.

Context

There are a number of staffing changes which will take effect from September 2014. A Deputy Principal has been appointed to join the college. His main areas of responsibility will be to develop the quality of teaching and the range of subjects and extra academic support that the college provides for students. The college has also recruited two teachers to take up new roles as lead practitioners for English and mathematics. This role will entail working with the English and mathematics departments to further develop the quality of teaching and also to share the most effective teaching across the college. One member of the senior leadership team will be seconded to the local authority for four days a week.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievement across the college is continuing to rise. Year 11 students took their GCSE English examination earlier in the school year. The results of these examinations indicate that the students have made good progress. The most-able students in Year 11 have also taken their GCSE examination in mathematics. Their results also indicate that they have made good progress.

Students' achievement across the college, in other subjects and key stages, is improving. The college's own information on students' achievement and the quality of work seen in students' books show that students are making good progress in many subjects. Students are achieving particularly well in English and religious education.

The progress students make in mathematics across the college is, however, inconsistent. This inconsistency is primarily linked to the quality of teaching. While some teaching in mathematics is good, too much is not of the same quality and does not enable students to make the progress of which they are capable. The college's leaders are fully aware of this and have clear plans in place to address the key issues.

Students that are eligible for extra government money through the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding receive effective extra support when necessary. For example, an external provider recently delivered intensive literacy and numeracy sessions for some students. The college's evaluation of these sessions indicates that

students made accelerated progress. Students that are eligible for the pupil premium funding achieve as well as, and often better than, their peers.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is improving and, as a result, students' achievement is rising. The college is reviewing its sixth form provision, and the guidance and advice given to students, to ensure that the students who do attend have the potential to succeed on the courses they choose to study.

The quality of teaching

The quality of feedback given to students, particularly through teachers' marking, has improved significantly. Teachers routinely provide students with information on what they have done well and how they can improve their learning further. Students respond to this feedback and they told inspectors that they feel it is helping them to achieve higher grades; inspectors agree with this.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. As a result, they use high-quality questioning techniques to assess students' understanding of key concepts and ideas. Teachers then question further to probe and deepen students' learning.

Teaching is typified by good, professional relationships between teachers and their students. Teachers have high expectations with regards to students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Students follow their teachers' instructions quickly which allows for swift transitions between activities, maximising learning time. Students work well on their own, with each other and in groups.

Occasionally, teachers do not use the information about students' achievement to plan activities that challenge their capacity to learn sufficiently. When this happens, students do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well around the college. They create a harmonious atmosphere and a positive ethos permeates the college. Students arrive on time, bring the correct equipment and wear their uniform well.

During teaching sessions, students exhibit positive attitudes. Little time is lost to off-task behaviour. Students show determination and resilience, and are keen to be successful.

Students are usually proud of their work and ensure it is well presented. On some occasions, however, some students' presentation needs to be improved to ensure their work is accurate and they can use their books as learning aids. Teachers do not always pay close enough attention to maintaining the highest expectations of students' presentation.

Students are aware of different types of bullying and how to keep themselves safe. They are particularly knowledgeable on how to stay safe when using the internet. Students indicate the college regularly reminds them of the key safety messages related to e-safety.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal and senior leaders have maintained improvements at the college, particularly with regard to the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Staff work closely alongside senior leaders to improve their practice and show a real determination to ensure the college continues to improve further.

The college has drawn on a significant amount of external support to improve the quality of teaching. This is having a positive impact and almost all inadequate teaching has been eradicated. The college does not, however, use its best teachers to work alongside others to improve their practice and to reflect on their own teaching.

Associate leaders, leaders with responsibility for subjects, monitor their departments thoroughly through a range of activities including observations of teaching, scrutiny of students' work, short visits to lessons and seeking students' views. They use this information well to produce plans which acknowledge what is going well in their departments and also to set out plans to improve them further. During this inspection, associate leaders conducted many observations jointly with inspectors. Inspectors found that associate leaders have a clear understanding of what constitutes good teaching and how teaching can be improved further.

The governing body has a good awareness of the college's strengths and its areas in need of further development. Governors are determined to maintain current improvements so that the college is removed from special measures as soon as possible, but also so that it continues to improve beyond that point. The governing body ensures that all safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements.

External support

The college has brokered substantial, effective, external support, which is delivered by educational consultants and leaders from other schools. The current priority has been to improve the quality of teaching. This external support works within the college and enables teachers to visit other schools to observe and share good practice. The college's improvement adviser makes regular visits to the college to monitor improvements and also to set targets for the college to improve further. She provides timely and useful information for the governing body so that it is clear on the progress the college is making.