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25 September 2014

Mrs Caroline Vile  
Headteacher  
Ellesmere Port Catholic High School  
Capenhurst Lane  
Ellesmere Port  
Cheshire CH65 7AQ

Dear Mrs Vile

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Ellesmere Port Catholic High School**

Following my visit with Peter McKay and Derek Barnes, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 23 and 24 September 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 and the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve teaching to be consistently good or better in order to accelerate students' progress in all subjects, especially mathematics, and particularly at Key Stage 3, in the sixth form and for disabled students and those with special educational needs by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching
  - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve
  - using assessment information to plan learning activities that provide suitable challenge through matching tasks more carefully to students' learning needs
  - checking students' understanding throughout lessons and adjusting activities or strategies when the rate of progress slows
  - presenting more interesting topics and a wider range of learning activities in order to improve the enjoyment and enthusiasm students have for learning
  - improving the quality of questioning to ensure students think more deeply about their work and have to explain and justify their ideas
  - applying whole-school approaches consistently to the marking of students' work, providing clear guidance for improvement and making certain that all students follow this advice
  - improving the effectiveness of teaching assistants through involving them in the assessment of students' work and the planning of lessons, and through teachers having a more flexible approach to how teaching assistants are deployed to support students' learning.
  
- Improve attendance and students' and some teachers' punctuality in arriving to lessons by:
  - analysing attendance data rigorously to ascertain which groups of pupils are not attending well and taking prompt and effective action to improve their attendance
  - monitoring students' punctuality in arriving on time to every lesson and taking prompt and effective action to address any lateness
  - reminding teachers of the need to show a good example to students by their arrival to lessons on time.
  
- Improve leadership and management and governance by:
  - ensuring teachers, leaders and managers at all levels rigorously evaluate the impact of their work on students' achievement, attendance and behaviour, and that they use these evaluations to guide further improvements
  - increasing the rigour with which governors, leaders and managers hold teachers and other staff to account for making improvements rapidly, particularly with regard to students' safety and achievement
  - increasing the involvement of parents and students as partners in school improvement.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 September 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, other staff in the school, groups of students and representatives of the local authority and the diocese. Inspectors spoke to students informally and observed how they interacted with each other at break and lunchtime. An inspector visited an assembly and dropped into a meeting of the school council, taking place after school. Inspectors scrutinised samples of students' work, examined schemes of work and other evidence, such as information on behaviour, attendance and students' progress.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a teacher in the mathematics department has resigned and a new role has been created to drive improvements in marking and assessment. There has been a restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of all support staff and a careers officer has been appointed. Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has received the results of public examinations taken by students at the end of Key Stages 4 and 5 in 2014. This information was considered carefully by inspectors during the monitoring inspection in order to judge the school's progress towards the removal of special measures.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

In Key Stage 5, there were signs of improvement in attainment and progress compared with 2013. More subjects in 2014 achieved a 100% success rate and the proportion of A\*, A and B grades awarded increased. In the large majority of subjects, students' attainment was higher than last year and they made better progress from their starting points on entry to the sixth form. However, students did not perform in line with expectations in mathematics and geography. In lessons observed during this inspection, students in the sixth form achieved well. For example, in a Year 12 history lesson, students displayed highly developed skills of source analysis and empathy in apportioning responsibility for the suffering endured by soldiers in the Crimean War.

In Key Stage 4, the proportion of students who achieved five A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, fell very slightly in 2014. This was largely because students' performance in mathematics was disappointing and did not meet the school's targets or predictions in this subject. On the other hand, students' achievement in English showed a considerable improvement. Students achieved well across a range of other subjects, including modern languages, information and communication technology, art, physical education, and religious education. In lessons observed during the inspection, students in Key Stage 4 achieved well overall. For example, students were observed engaging enthusiastically in an English

lesson, using a combination of their own thinking, input from the teacher and the sharing of ideas with each other to write fluent and well-structured film reviews.

During the inspection, the school provided information to show that in Key Stage 3, students' progress is accelerating as they respond positively to more challenging and enjoyable lessons.

In most subjects, except science, students with disabilities or special educational needs are on course to meet their targets and achieve at least in line with their peers. However, disadvantaged students do not achieve as well as other students in the school and, furthermore, the gap is widening.

### **The quality of teaching**

The drive to improve the quality of teaching has continued apace since the previous monitoring inspection. Teachers on support plans receive specific guidance on how to improve and there is evidence that this has already helped to motivate staff and increase their confidence, resulting in a more positive learning environment for their students.

The tailored programme of training, which had only recently been implemented at the previous monitoring inspection, is now fully embedded, ensuring all teachers and leaders receive the support they require to fulfil their roles effectively. The impact of this training can now be seen in the higher expectations that most teachers have as to what students can achieve; as one teacher commented, 'We're all learning and all want the best for the children.'

Students spoke very favourably of the improvements they have noticed in the quality of teaching. As one student commented, during the inspection, 'Much less time is wasted – teachers move us on more quickly in lessons and we get more done.' However, inspectors noticed that some lessons are still not challenging enough for some of the most able students and teaching remains noticeably weaker in some subjects, such as mathematics and science.

The whole-school approach to improving marking has started to have an impact and feedback to students on their work is now of much better quality. Students spoken to during the monitoring inspection commented that their work is marked more regularly and the use of 'green and red pen' marking helps them to see more clearly what they need to do to improve. Students particularly appreciate 'MAD' time when they have the opportunity in lessons to make corrections to their work, reflecting and acting upon the suggestions for improvement that their teachers have made.

The school is far ahead of many other schools in its innovative approach to ensuring a smooth transition to the new National Curriculum and assessment without levels. In this regard, the school's practice is exemplary.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Attendance overall continues to improve and is now just slightly below average. However, this is not the case in the sixth form, where the rate of absence has increased on this time last year. Teachers and students now arrive on time to lessons, allowing learning to proceed briskly in a more business-like fashion.

Students have noticed marked improvements in behaviour. They attribute this to the much higher profile of senior leaders around the school, who respond swiftly when staff experience the slightest disruption to their lessons. Poor behaviour is no longer tolerated, but very quickly dealt with.

Students also spoke proudly of the new bullying policy, which they devised: 'A policy by pupils, for pupils'. This policy provides clear, unequivocal guidance to remind students that bullying is utterly unacceptable. Students spoken to during the visit expressed strong feelings about how all people should be treated equally, whatever their race, gender or sexuality.

Students appreciate the new rewards they receive for good behaviour and the fact that they have been consulted by school leaders about improvements to the school. For example, they love the way the corridors have been painted in different colours to reflect the various subjects they study: they feel pleased that the suggestions they made were listened to and acted upon.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The inspirational leadership provided by the headteacher continues to galvanise all members of the school community. As a result, Ellesmere Port Catholic High is rapidly improving and feels like a very different school to the one visited shortly after the previous inspection.

The new leader of the sixth form has tackled weaknesses with vigour. She has immediately improved procedures for recruitment to the sixth form so that students receive better guidance as to which courses they should pursue. As a result the retention rate has already improved. The appointment of a careers officer has also been beneficial to some students, who say they now feel more knowledgeable about the requirements for university entrance.

Much more robust procedures for monitoring the performance of staff who teach in the sixth form have been introduced including lesson observations, analysis of information on students' progress and students' comments on how well they feel they are being taught. As these initiatives are at the early stage of development, there is as yet no clear evidence of impact.

In the past, school leaders have had an overgenerous view regarding the quality of teaching. There is now much more focus on the impact teaching is having on

learning. Revised procedures for the management of performance have been introduced which take a more thorough view of teachers' work by, for example, holding them to account for the achievement of the students they teach.

The headteacher has demonstrated considerable acumen in making a series of new appointments to drive improvements 'from the middle'. Leaders have responsibility for specific areas, such as the progress of disadvantaged students and marking. This empowers individual members of staff and at the same time distributes leadership across the school. This has helped to create a culture of ambition and a shared sense of purpose.

The governing body has responded to the increased demands made upon them with confidence, enthusiasm and commitment. Governors are now much more knowledgeable and challenge school leaders to take urgent action to sort out areas of weakness, such as mathematics. Members of the governing body come into school more frequently and are utterly 'on the ball' when it comes to holding staff to account. Since the previous monitoring inspection, governors have conducted a gap analysis to find out how the governing body itself could be improved. The new members of the team have complementary skills that have helped to strengthen further this astute and loyal governing body.

### **External support**

The support that the school has received from the local authority has been ineffective regarding mathematics. Last year, school leaders and the local authority had an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching and the progress of students in mathematics. As a result school leaders did not act swiftly enough to reverse the decline in students' performance in mathematics. However, school leaders have appreciated the effective support the school has received from the local authority to help to improve attendance and also for students with special educational needs.

The support that the school receives from the diocese is utterly exemplary, providing the school with incisive guidance and advice regarding its strategic direction.

The headteacher continues to use her links with outstanding schools, such as St John Bosco Arts College and Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College, to good effect. A link has also been established recently with Tarporley High School to support improvement in mathematics.