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3 October 2014

Yvonne Lucey
Principal
Thomas Becket Catholic School
Becket Way
Kettering Road North
Northampton
NN3 6HT

Dear Mrs Lucey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thomas Becket Catholic School

Following my visit with Patrick Walsh and Denise Newsome, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 30 September–1 October 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 March 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers in English and in 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 Northamptonshire, the Diocese and the Education Funding Agency

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement improves by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently plan interesting activities and prepare resources that are closely matched to students' differing abilities and needs within their classes
 - training staff to enable them to prepare more suitable work for students who speak English as an additional language, disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - making sure teachers frequently evaluate the rate of progress being made by individual students during a lesson, moving them on with their learning quickly once they show understanding or providing support for those who need it, so that a good pace of learning is maintained, with no wasted time
 - eliminating low-level disruption and poor behaviour
 - ensuring that written marking is followed up with opportunities for students to respond to the advice on how to improve their work by attempting a new challenge or practising skills, to enable them to reach and exceed their targets
 - improving the consistency of teaching and achievement between subjects and in the sixth form.

- Improve leadership and management by building the capacity of subject leaders to enable them to address effectively inconsistencies in teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility and to drive improvement.

- Ensure that the range of subjects offered matches the needs and interests of all groups of students and enables them to achieve.

- Raise attendance by promoting the importance of regular attendance to students and their parents and carers.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 30 September – 1 October 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders. Discussions also took place with the subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, as well as with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Inspectors met with groups of students from Key Stages 3, 4 and from the sixth form. Inspectors observed students' learning in lessons and were accompanied by senior leaders to observe students' progress and to look at the work in their books. The lead inspector also briefly visited additional English, mathematics and science lessons, accompanied by the Principal. A meeting took place with the Chair of the School Committee, and telephone conversations were held with the Diocesan Commissioner for Schools, a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Federation Governing Body. Inspectors scrutinised the school's records of recruitments checks on staff.

Context

Plans for the school to become an academy with effect from 1 September 2014 have been delayed. Permission is being sought from the Department for Education to replace the federation governing body with an interim executive board in the near future. A significant proportion of teachers have left the school. Replacement staff have been found, some of whom are from teacher supply agencies. The David Ross Education Trust (DRET) no longer acts as a school improvement partner. A new SENCO has been appointed. All students in Year 7 are members of the 'Phoenix Group', a tailor-made curriculum to target their specific learning needs.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including in English and mathematics fell slightly in 2014, and remains well below the 2013 national average. Whereas students' progress in English has continued to improve, this is not the case in mathematics. Progress in mathematics has not accelerated quickly enough to have an impact on students' attainment. The gaps in attainment and progress in mathematics for those students who are disabled or who have special educational needs and other students in the school are too wide and are not closing at a quick enough rate. The provision for students with special education needs has not been effective enough to ensure that the specific learning needs of these students have been adequately met. The gaps in attainment for those students eligible for pupil premium funding and their classmates are also not closing quickly enough. Additional support financed through this additional funding has not had the desired effect, and some students were targeted too late because they had not been identified until late in the academic year. School leaders have identified

underachievement in mathematics in Years 8, 9 and 10 as a key priority for the school.

A number of additional subject areas underachieved in 2014, as had been predicted by the school. These include art, French, sociology and resistant materials. Students following vocational courses achieve well.

Standards are steadily improving in the sixth form and their attainment is broadly in line with the national average. The majority of students in Year 13 went on to study at a university of their choice.

The quality of teaching

The school has had to recruit a significant number of new teachers to replace those who left at the end of the summer term. Some of these teachers are from teacher supply agencies because school leaders face challenges in appointing permanent teachers in some key subjects. The quality of teaching is still too inconsistent. Consequently, teaching over time is having a variable impact on students' outcomes. Some teaching has very little impact on accelerating students' progress. Where teaching is better, it is clearly having some impact, but it is not consistently effective in securing rapid progress. In short, too much teaching requires improvement and some is inadequate.

Where teaching is more effective, teachers make good use of different learning outcomes for all groups of students in the class. This includes lessons where students are grouped by ability, including top sets. A recently introduced expectation that all teachers plan lessons in which students have four choices of learning outcomes aims to ensure that all teachers plan lessons which allow students to progress at an appropriate rate based on their prior attainment. Inspectors saw this being successfully delivered in some instances. However, the use of this system is inconsistent. Although some teachers present a choice of learning outcomes at the start of the lesson, they become tokenistic because the lesson itself does not allow students to access all of them.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers are not checking regularly during the lesson that students understand what they are learning. Hence, some become easily distracted and quickly fall behind.

The quality of marking remains variable. A very recently introduced sticker system which identifies what students have done well and how they can improve is welcomed by the students. However, not all teachers are skilled enough in writing supportive comments and questions which require an appropriate response from students. Where this is done well, students are able to show that they have understood what they got wrong and demonstrate progress. Such examples of good practice are currently rare. Some books have not been marked since the start of the

academic year. Some teachers accept work from students which is poorly presented, particularly in classes for lower-attaining students.

The allocation of teaching assistants to subject areas aims to improve their effectiveness so that they can specialise in one particular subject area and provide more expert guidance to students. In some subjects, this is working well. However, not all teaching assistants have a detailed enough understanding of individual students' special educational needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are typically polite, well mannered and respectful. Nearly all students work hard in lessons, particularly where the teaching sustains their interest. Inspectors saw some low-level disruptive behaviour in some lessons, and students told inspectors that this can act as a barrier to their making good progress. Students also believe that teachers continue to implement the classroom sanctions system inconsistently.

Inspectors witnessed some boisterous behaviour in the corridors during lesson changeover. The strong staff presence around the school at peak times is a typical occurrence. These staff have to give a small number of students constant reminders about how they should wear their uniform, to which most respond positively.

Attendance is improving and approaching the national average. The proportion of students who are persistently absent from school has been halved, as has the proportion taking holidays during term time. The number of fixed-term exclusions has also been reduced.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders, managers and members of the governing body have not demonstrated the necessary urgency since the previous monitoring visit in tackling the school's weaknesses. There is clearly a determination to make the school better but the pace of change has been too slow. Although a permanent experienced SENCO has now been appointed, the provision for those students who have special educational needs has been compromised in the past because clear systems for meeting their needs have not been in place. The new SENCO has started to map out what support each student requires and how this will be provided at a specialist level. However, this is at an early stage of development.

Leaders' actions have had an impact in some subjects, particularly in English, in the post-16 provision and in the curriculum. For example, leaders are quite clear about how adding an additional year to the Key Stage 4 curriculum aims to ensure that students are better prepared for their new courses and examinations. The majority of middle leaders are relatively new to their posts, although not all are new to the

school, and have a variable range of experience. They have embarked on training programmes to develop their leadership skills. Their understanding and use of performance data is an area which the school acknowledges needs addressing. Only then can such data be used to best effect for planning lessons and tracking students' progress.

The school's leaders have identified the key areas which aim to bring about school improvement, but a whole-school improvement plan which is supported by plans at subject leader level has not yet been finalised for this academic year. Leaders have produced a self-evaluation document but their judgements as to where they believe the school to be are not supported by enough evidence.

Governance has not had the desired impact in moving the school forward at a rapid enough rate. This is partly due to the unwieldy size of the federation governing body, which oversees a number of schools. Neither the federation governing body nor the School Committee have increased their level of challenge sufficiently to secure rapid school improvement. Governors have also had little impact in ensuring that the pupil premium funding has been deployed to best effect for those students who are eligible to receive it.

External support

The planned support from DRET did not materialise and the Trust no longer supports the school. The Principal has continued to strengthen the school's partnership with a local outstanding school which she established soon after her arrival. This school continues to provide support for the mathematics faculty. The local authority has not conducted a review of the school's effectiveness since the previous monitoring inspection. With the withdrawal of support from DRET, the local authority now sees this as an opportunity to work in closer collaboration with the school, using the expertise of the local outstanding school, to put together a specialised programme of support.

Copied to:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)