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17 October 2014

Mrs Helen Knight
Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and Language College
Potters Green Road
Coventry
CV2 2AJ

Dear Mrs Knight

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and Language College

Following my visit to your school on 16 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Coventry and as below.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement, particularly for the more able, for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, and in mathematics, by:
  - ensuring that teachers plan lessons that include activities that match the full ability range of students
  - ensure that each student is aware of the challenges set for them
  - helping students develop their skills in learning independently
  - ensuring teachers assess students' understanding in lessons more effectively so that they know whether they should adapt their lessons and which students need more help.

- Tackle low-level disruption in order to improve progress for all students.

- Ensure that the school's leaders, including governors, have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and are rigorous in comparing the school's performance to national figures.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 October 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and the consultant School Improvement Partner. The inspector visited nine classsrooms to sample teaching and learning, looked at the written work of students, and observed students' behaviour at break and lunchtime. The inspector scrutinised records of recent local authority reviews, governing body notes, the independent review of governance, recent public examination provisional results, attendance and behaviour records, and documents related to safeguarding.

Context

Since the inspection in December 2013, 24 staff have left the school. In September 2014, 23 new staff joined the school, including eight newly qualified teachers and two Teach First teachers. The school is considering joining a multi-academy trust led by another local Catholic school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

School leaders at all levels are tackling the areas for improvement, with good support from external partners. There is now a consistent school-wide understanding of what needs to be done to improve teaching across the school. Middle leaders are now leading the work of improving the quality and consistency of teaching in their departments. As a result, teaching is improving and students' achievement is starting to rise.

These improvements were not in place quickly enough to impact significantly on the achievement of Year 11 students in the 2014 GCSE results; achievement then was inadequate. There were signs of better progress in mathematics, and better overall achievement for less-able and more-able students. The overall gap narrowed between disadvantaged students and all students nationally but it still remains too wide. Too many middle ability students achieved grade D rather than grade C GCSEs in some of their subjects. A thorough review of the 2014 results identified concerns over the accuracy of teachers' predictions. The school has swiftly addressed this by the introduction of much more frequent student progress checks, informed by formal written tests.

The review of governance identified generally 'sound' practice but a weakness in the thoroughness of how governors held the school to account for achievement. As a result, subject link governors attend the new half-termly formal 'progress reviews'. In these reviews, subject leaders evaluate students' progress and teaching quality with a senior line manager and external school improvement partner. The reviews themselves are highlighting a legacy of overly positive 'good teaching' judgements that do not tally with the evidence that students' achievement often requires

improvement. In some governing body minutes, a sense of over-optimism remains because of a tendency to compare the school's performance with other local schools rather than with all schools nationally. Nevertheless, the positive and swift response of governors to review findings, and the shared accountability across all levels of school leadership, are evidence of improving capacity of leadership and management.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school has made good progress in tackling low-level disruption through the effective behaviour and rewards policy. Records show sharply falling incidents, improving attendance and falling exclusions.
- All lessons begin with clear information to students about what they are expected to learn.
- Almost all marking seen includes feedback to students on their strengths, and includes targets for further improvement. Some of these targets are very precise, leading to immediate action by the students.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The extent to which lessons are planned to include activities that match the full ability range of students is not yet consistent.

External support

There has been effective and well-coordinated support by the local authority and a partner school. This has helped this school to break down the actions for improvement into manageable steps, starting with resolving low-level disruption. Substantial consultant support for improving mathematics is starting to show in better progress. Further consultant guidance on involving middle leaders in regular evaluation of students' progress is catalysing wider accountability for students' achievement. Regular external reviews are helpful in informing senior leaders and governors of progress, and where to focus attention.