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Mr Andrew Keeley
Headteacher
St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School
Grangeway
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 5YH

Dear Mr Keeley

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and supporting National Leader of Education (NLE), two representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

The headteacher is currently supported by a National Leader of Education (NLE) from another faith school, experienced in school improvement. This NLE has been appointed as Interim Executive Headteacher from January 2015. The substantive headteacher will retire at the end of December 2014. An existing deputy headteacher has been internally promoted to the position of interim head of school

from January 2015. The former Chair of the Governing Body has resigned. The governing body reconstituted two days before the last section 5 inspection to meet recent regulatory requirements. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been elected.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Appropriate actions are being taken to move the school forward. There is an obvious determination amongst the staff to improve the quality of provision. The headteacher, supported by the NLE, has led the school in responding positively to the findings of the most recent inspection. There is a clear message that all staff are responsible for raising achievement and accelerating the progress students make. The NLE has carried out a comprehensive review of leadership to clarify roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. A teaching and learning leadership team has been established to support the development of more effective strategies of teaching and learning. Prior to the inspection, leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching were not moderated. Whole school training on lesson observation has recently taken place. This has resulted in a greater focus on observing the quality of students' learning and the progress they make during lessons. The school has also communicated to staff what is considered to be the key components of high quality teaching and these form the basis of continuing professional development for teachers. Staff have responded well. There is a developing enthusiasm for taking new approaches to teaching and learning forward.

Governors have restructured their committees and a specific committee has been formed to focus on the school's journey towards removal of special measures. A number of governors have undertaken training to raise their awareness of data relating to students' performance. Two governors have now been nominated to focus on data, achievement, progress and standards. They will report to the standards committee and through this to the full governing body.

The local authority and dioceses are not insisting on an Interim Executive Board to provide interim, short term governance, because they believe that the reconstitution and robust plans of the governing body will improve existing governance and make it more effective. The most recent full governing body meeting was described as very positive and very challenging. Minutes of the meeting reflect this view. Although recognising the need for improvement, not all governors have been able to recognise or accept why the school has been placed in special measures. Governors will need to ensure that this does not impede the rate of improvement of the school on its journey towards removal of special measures and impair their ability to evaluate rigorously and objectively the impact of actions taken to improve.

A National Leader of Governance (NLG) has been commissioned to undertake an external review of governance. The NLG attended a governing body meeting and carried out an audit of skills and understanding of the responsibilities that the role of governor carries. The review findings will be reported to the governing body in February. His interim recommendation is that all meetings at present should include all governors.

An external review of the use of pupil premium (additional funding provided for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority) is intended to be carried out early in the New Year.

There is a single integrated action plan which incorporates the local authority's statement of action and which has been agreed by the dioceses, the local authority, senior leadership team and the consultant NLE. All key issues identified in the inspection report are included in the plan and they have been properly prioritised, giving highest priority to those actions which will have the most impact on improving outcomes for students.

Issues relating to the lack of compliance of the school's website are fully resolved. The school has commissioned external consultants to carry out an audit of the website with the outcomes reported in early December.

Although the joint local authority and school action plan identifies appropriate actions, it does not contain success criteria that are linked to precise outcomes for students at specific times. These should be the milestones and indicators which would allow senior leaders and governors to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and determine whether they were cost effective and gave value for money.

It is recommended that targets need to be set for core subjects of English, mathematics, science, modern foreign language and religious education for each year group. These must be precise, based on quantifiable evidence and linked to students' attainment and progress, or other outcomes such as rates of attendance and behaviour where relevant. They should include targets for closing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers.

Assessment points are now fixed in the school calendar with a clear structure. Monitoring and verification of the assessment outcomes against targets should be carried out by senior leaders supported by the commissioned consultant with evaluation undertaken by the governing body.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action integrated with the school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school should submit a revised improvement plan by the end of January 2015.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Denis Oliver
Associate Inspector

Appointed as an Associate Inspector, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.