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Martin Cain
Headteacher
Blessed Robert Sutton Catholic Sports College
Bluestone Lane
Stapenhill
Burton-on-Trent
DE15 9SD

Dear Mr Cain

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blessed Robert Sutton Catholic Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 19 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Sharpen the Getting to Good Action Plan through setting measurable targets against which your progress can be judged so that you can demonstrate to governors that your actions are making a difference.
- Take immediate steps to improve the way in which assessment information is used to set targets for students so that:
 - all subject leaders understand how targets are set
 - targets set are focussed on improving the proportion of students making better than expected progress.
- Further refine the new approach to learning reviews so that it is more manageable for all subject leaders and identifies the key strengths of practice and what needs to improve.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders in the school, and a group of four subject leaders. I also met with a group of three governors which included the Chair of the Governing Body. A further meeting was held with the local authority commissioning manager for school improvement. In all these meetings we discussed the action taken since the last inspection. A series of short visits to Year 11 science lessons were carried out to look for any early signs of impact on students' learning of the school's steps taken to improve the quality of teaching. The school's action plan was also evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection there have been several changes in staffing, which includes the appointment of a new subject leader for English and an interim arrangement for the co-ordinator of special educational needs (SENCO) involving the deputy headteacher. There have been other changes in teaching staff in English and science.

Main findings

Since your section 5 inspection, you and your senior leaders have remained committed to your aim to accelerate learning by improving the quality of teaching in the school. You and governors have worked together to ensure there is no complacency and all subject leaders and teachers share your aim. In taking steps to address the areas for improvement from your inspection, several new systems have been introduced which are providing greater rigour to the way in which you monitor teaching. Other changes planned include the introduction of a more personalised support programme for students which should provide a more holistic approach to student care. If successful this will ensure all students identified as needing support have a named point of contact to act as a mentor and to help them to improve their progress. The appointment of a new SENCO is a critical first step in these plans and this process will start shortly.

Weaknesses in subject leadership are being addressed through support and training, for example in coaching them to challenge poor teaching in their area with greater speed and decisiveness. Senior leaders meet regularly with subject leaders and notes are recorded from these meetings although specific actions agreed need to be stated and clear deadlines set. Subject leaders require further support to help them to better understand how assessment information can be used in planning teaching activities and to resolve the confusion that exists around how student targets are set and how these are used to monitor progress. Targets currently set for students will not guarantee that teachers' expectations are sufficiently high enough to improve the proportion of students making more progress than the minimum expected of them.

There is evidence of good leadership practices among subject leaders but this is not readily shared and leads to inconsistencies. Moderation activities, for example, vary between subjects in terms of their frequency and rigour. School leaders need to take steps to ensure the best practice is shared more routinely across the school.

You have reviewed the way in which you check on the quality of teaching and have introduced a cycle of more frequent 'learning reviews' based on longer visits to lessons, in addition to formal lesson observations. The pro formas you use to gather information during the reviews are very detailed and therefore not easy for some subject leaders to use, especially those who are relatively inexperienced or who are receiving support in their roles. A more focussed approach on particular themes, rather than trying to do everything in a short visit will improve the quality of the information collected.

The way in which teachers plan a variety of tasks in lessons to encourage all students to take part has been a feature of your staff training. There is evidence of this being implemented in teachers' planning, as seen in science. Where it is used well, students are interested in the tasks set and are challenged as they move through the tasks. In weaker cases all students, including the most able, have to complete the more basic and easy activities first before progressing to work that makes them think harder. Senior leaders talked enthusiastically about the improvements being made to teaching as a result of the coaching programme, used where you have identified teaching to be 'not yet good'. Your checks on teaching show that where the coaching programme has been used, the quality of teaching is improving and there is now less teaching in the school being judged by yourselves as 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement'.

Your most recent analysis of assessment information for Year 11 and the sixth form shows that students' achievements are improving, compared with results in 2014. There are still some concerns over the reliability of this information in Year 13 due to some courses being taught off-site through the sixth form partnership arrangement which is in its final year of operation. The 'within school gap' in achievements for disadvantaged students and other students is narrowing, as is the gap with others nationally. You have taken steps to ensure assessment information is used well to identify any underachievement in other groups such as your 'high attainers' group and those with special educational needs.

The 'Getting to Good' action plan requires further refinement and amendment to make it a much more useful document against which progress, and the direction of travel, can be judged. The intended impact of your actions is stated but there are no measurable targets set, nor is it sufficiently clear how these actions will be resourced, monitored and evaluated. It will therefore be difficult for you to demonstrate to governors that your actions are actually making a difference.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Effective support has been commissioned through the local authority commissioning manager and training for teachers has already been delivered on 'Improving Differentiation' and to further develop subject leadership through the middle leadership programme. Additional support and training for teachers is planned to help address the needs of students who speak English as an additional language and those who are at the early stages of learning English. This support will be of benefit to the large number of students of Polish heritage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire local authority and as below.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- Diocesan Director of Education, Gail Neil, Gail.Neill@nottingham-des.org.uk