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Mrs Beverley Scott-Herron

Headteacher

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

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Dear Mrs Scott-Herron

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2015, 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 my visit, I held meetings with you and the senior leaders responsible for teaching and learning, the curriculum, students' achievement and attendance. I met with the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool. I evaluated the school improvement plan and the local authority's statement of action; both of which were written in response to the findings of the previous inspection. I was taken on a tour of the school by two students and I spoke with a group of students, over lunch, in the dining hall. I scrutinised the work in a sample of books from students in Year 11. This was to

enable me to form an impression of students' attitudes to learning and the quality of marking.

Context

There have been a large number of changes in personnel since the previous inspection, which have resulted in some staff turbulence. You and the governing body are continuing to manage personnel issues and bring much needed calm to the teaching team. Since the previous inspection, the head of English, the second in the English department, the head of geography and the head of design and technology have left the school. You are currently in the process of recruiting for two head of department posts and a teacher of English. The subject responsibility for English is currently being covered by the deputy headteacher. Three teachers are on fixed term contracts and an assistant headteacher will be retiring at Easter. A vacancy for a teacher of science has been filled from January and governors have also appointed an attendance officer and a member of staff to take specific responsibility for safeguarding. A new head of technology is to join the staff at the start of the summer term. You and the governing body have plans in place to restructure the senior leadership team. Your intention is to align senior leaders' responsibilities more closely with the school's improvement priorities and, in doing so, effectively manage the pace of change.

To help your drive to improve Sir Thomas Boteler, the local authority has brokered links with two successful local schools. As a result, senior leaders are being effectively supported by two national leaders of education and specialist leaders in education are working with teachers in English, mathematics, science, information technology and special educational needs.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's key stakeholders agree that the judgements of inspectors at the previous inspection were correct and accurately reflected the position of the school at that time.

Governors were surprised at the substantial decline in attainment at GCSE in 2014. Their over-reliance on senior leaders for information about students' performance and the inaccuracy of teachers' assessments of how well students were doing during the year hampered governors' ability to hold key staff to account. This was further compounded by senior leaders' over emphasis on students' examination results and not enough on the progress students were making from the time they started at Sir Thomas Boteler in Year 7 to the time they left in Year 11. Consequently, senior leaders and governors had a much more positive view of students' performance than

was actually the case. As a result, they did not act to address students' weak progress which had been significantly below average, at the end of Key Stage 4, for the previous three years. Governors have learned from this experience. They are much more knowledgeable about how well students in the school are currently doing and receive regular information about students' performance from senior leaders. However, governors are under no illusions that they need to assure the information they receive, by comparing the school's performance against national benchmarks.

Governors are kept up to date with the progress that senior leaders and their colleagues are making against each of the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. For example, they have supported the headteacher's drive to improve the rigour of teachers' performance management and how the outcomes of performance management are being used, robustly by the headteacher, to make decisions about teachers' pay. However, governors have yet to commission the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government money) as recommended at the previous inspection. This needs to be carried out as a matter of urgency so that students supported by this funding have their learning and progress maximised.

Senior leaders have introduced greater rigour to their monitoring of teachers' classroom practice. Teachers are now regularly observed teaching, their good practice affirmed and priorities for improvement identified. Teachers then receive training, as appropriate, to address these priorities; with future observations used to determine the impact of this training. Although senior leaders' monitoring has raised teachers' expectations of what is expected of them in the classroom, observers place too much emphasis on what the teacher is doing and not enough on the impact that teaching is having on students' learning. Despite this, senior leaders and governors have evidence that the quality of teaching in the school is improving. However, they are clear that these improvements have yet to have sufficient impact on students' outcomes.

Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of marking is beginning to bear fruit. There are examples of good quality marking in the school, for example in religious education and English. However, inconsistencies remain and marking in some departments is not of sufficient quality to inform students of the next steps in their learning and so accelerate their progress.

You and your colleagues have introduced much greater rigour to the monitoring of students' performance. Senior leaders collect data on students' attainment in each subject, four times per year. These data are then carefully analysed and students identified as being off target are given extra help to get them back on track. To assure the accuracy of teachers' assessments you have utilised the expertise of the

subject leaders from your support schools and subject staff from other local schools to check their reliability. As a result, senior leaders and governors are confident that they have a more accurate picture than was the case in the past of how well students in each year group are doing. For example, the current data are suggesting that in Year 11 the proportion of students achieving five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is already 14 percentage points higher than it was at the end of Key Stage 4 last year, with indications that this measure will rise even further. However, although senior leaders' analysis of students' performance is thorough, opportunities to use these data to provide a broader picture for senior leaders and governors of how well the different groups in the school are performing are missed. For example, how well girls are achieving compared to the boys. Further, senior leaders place too much emphasis on attainment measures and not enough on the progress that students are making against their targets. Although these developments are encouraging and the current data providing a more positive picture of performance, in light of the school's history of unreliability when assessing students' attainment and progress, the governors are right to temper their optimism with a modicum of caution.

The school's systems for monitoring students' attendance and managing persistent absence have been strengthened. If a student fails to register, his or her parent receives a text message alerting them to the fact that their child has not arrived at school. This provides evidence for the school's promotion of students' safety. Home visits and meetings with parents of students who are persistently absent enable the school to determine the reasons for a students' non-attendance and provide extra help and support to get them into school. These systems have been in place for a relatively short time only and the full impact of the school's work to improve attendance has yet to be felt.

Senior leaders have taken a realistic approach to dealing with weaknesses in students' reading, writing and oral communication. For example, all students in Year 7 and Year 8 have been allocated extra teaching time to improve their literacy skills. However, this is a relatively new initiative and it is too early to assess its impact. Further, the senior leaders with curriculum responsibility have reviewed the range of subjects being studied by students in Year 10. This has led to a small number of students changing their courses of study in order to broaden the curriculum they are following. The intention is that this change will widen the opportunities available to these students when they leave the school.

The local authority's post-Ofsted statement of action is detailed. It is written in three sections, each section relating to one of the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. The actions to be taken to address each of the areas for improvement in the report are clear as are the measures of success. Similarly, the

school improvement plan is very detailed, providing a focus for senior leaders in their work to improve the school. The school's plan, however, could be sharper.

Timescales for each of the actions being taken to improve the school need greater clarification, for example, by ensuring each action has a clear start and end date, giving senior leaders and governors a time frame for measuring its impact. Further, targets for achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 are not broken down into the expected outcomes for each of the various groups that make up Year 11. Nevertheless, the plan is providing an effective blueprint for improving the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 Executive Director Families & Wellbeing for Warrington, the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Chester and the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector