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Mrs Catrina Hamilton
Headteacher
St Edmund's Catholic School
Old Charlton Road
Dover
CT16 2QB

Dear Mrs Hamilton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Edmund's Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 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 October 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:

- clarify the dates by when each of the required actions arising from the last inspection will be completed and set out more clearly any resources that are being used to address them.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and students. I also met with a representative of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection two members of staff have joined the school. The Archdiocese, the local authority and the governors continue to discuss the full range of possibilities for the future strategic leadership of the school.

Main findings

You have acted swiftly and decisively to address the areas for improvement set out at the previous inspection. You have been ably supported by a strong leadership team. You are also training less experienced leaders so that the overall quality of leadership continues to rise.

Your action plans are appropriate. They are focused correctly on improving teaching, the behaviour of students and necessary improvements to leadership and management. Statements about work completed successfully so far are helpful and are the result of careful evaluation. However, the plans lack some basic details about the dates by when some actions will have been completed or how much they will cost. For example, you have not said clearly how much time may be needed to carry out many of the tasks.

There are some noticeable improvements to some aspects of the school's work. In particular, the school is now able to provide robust and reliable information about the current progress of students. This is a marked change from two years ago where the local authority had judged there to be a 'paucity' of data. The school is also able to provide accurate and realistic estimates of students' likely performance in future public examinations. Over time it is possible to see a steady increase in students' results so that they compare more favourably with national averages. The rate of students' progress is quickening because teachers now know what students already know, understand and are able to do and plan lessons taking this into account.

Teaching is also improving steadily. Students report that it is better overall than at this time last year. They say that there are still some places where their learning is not as fast as they would like. You have provided extensive and effective training for the many new teachers who have joined the school. A few of them comment positively about the support you have provided and the various training sessions they have received. There are emerging strengths in mathematics and English but challenges relating to recruitment are holding back necessary improvements in, for example, science and humanities. You know this because you have created a much more rigorous system of checks on teachers' work which includes lesson observations, work scrutinies and analysis of students' progress information class-by-class.

Your work to keep students safe is extremely good. In addition to the new gates, all appropriate checks on adults working with the students are complete and are undertaken to good effect.

A formal review of governance has not taken place as recommended at the last inspection. However, there is a strategic plan shared between the Governing Body, the Archdiocese and the local authority to address this. By 1 April 2015, it is intended that the interim executive board (IEB) will be replaced by a new full governing body. Four members of the IEB will continue to serve on the new body to provide continuity. The existing IEB has a secure and accurate view of the school. Its members know the strengths of the school and what else needs to improve.

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

Support from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark has been strong. The Archdiocese has provided some financial support for necessary modifications to the buildings and the physical environment. It has brokered the services of an existing leadership team from a partner school. As a result, the deepening decline in the leadership and morale of the school has been reversed. The Archdiocese is currently considering how to sustain these notable improvements to leadership. Support has also been strong from the local authority's school improvement adviser. Effective work has been undertaken, for example, in reviewing the provision for disadvantaged students and those with additional educational needs. As a result, outcomes are improving for each of these groups. The Brook Learning Alliance has also provided support to the school through effective departmental and leadership reviews.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector