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Ms Margaret Mulchrone
Headteacher
Thomas More Catholic School
Russell Hill Road
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CR8 2XP

Dear Ms Mulchrone

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas More Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 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 November 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:

- ensure that the recommendations from the external review of governance are implemented during the current reconstitution of the governing body
- use the outcomes of the recent external review of the school's use of the pupil premium to focus planning for improvement in the achievement of disadvantaged students.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and four governors and eight middle leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with a representative of the diocese. In addition, I spoke on the telephone with a representative of the

local authority. I toured the school with you and visited a number of lessons, evaluating the marking and assessment of work in a sample of students' books. Various documents were scrutinised including the action plan drawn up following the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, three members of the teaching staff have left the school and three others have joined. The school has appointed coordinators for literacy and numeracy who have taken up the responsibility for student support in Key Stage 3 for these subjects. A new clerk to the governing body has been appointed.

Main findings

The school's action plan is comprehensive and clearly linked to the recommendations in the inspection report. Priorities for improvement are suitably detailed with key personnel identified and timescales outlined.

The school has worked well to improve the general presentation of work in students' books. In addition, there is now a more structured approach to marking and guidance for students. This is helping to improve their understanding and engagement. Students note the greater expectations for their work and the requirement to respond to teachers' marking through specific activities to be undertaken. They appreciate this deeper analysis of their work. Several students could give examples where they had improved their grades through specific activities initiated by teachers' marking.

A new assessment tracking system has been implemented which provides comprehensive data on students' progress. This provides leaders and teachers with a good range of information on individuals and groups which is being used to evaluate progress more precisely. The use of this system is beginning to improve the effectiveness of intervention where underachievement is identified for specific groups. In addition, teachers are increasingly using this information to plan more sharply focused activities in lessons. However, despite clear improvements in lesson planning and intervention strategies, this has not yet led to sustained improvements in outcomes for students.

There has been a range of support to improve the effectiveness of middle leaders. This has included specific training on work scrutiny, teaching observations and the use of progress data. The senior leadership team have worked with middle leaders to develop a more structured approach to the observation of teaching with a stronger emphasis of evaluating the impact of teaching over time. This has led to more accurate evaluations of teaching. Middle leaders are positive about their enhanced role, recognising that they are now more accountable for the outcomes of their subject departments.

A comprehensive external review of governance was undertaken in December 2014. The report following the review contained a range of specific recommendations for

governors. The Chair of the Governing Body has led the review and implementation of the report findings and governors are working on the required improvements to their practice. The current reconstitution of the governing body is being used to thoroughly review and improve practice. It will be important that the newly reconstituted governing body takes the opportunity to implement fully the recommendations from the review.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has also been undertaken and, at the time of this monitoring inspection, the report had only just been received. The school has used the new assessment tracking system to review the progress of disadvantaged students, but has not had time to consider the recommendations of the review in detail. Therefore, school practice is not yet aligned to the findings of the review report.

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

The local authority is taking appropriate action to challenge the school through regular progress meetings with senior leaders. The diocesan authority is providing effective support through its education adviser and its network of schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Croydon.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector