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Mr Tony Billings
Executive Headteacher
St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School
Grangeway
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 5YH

Dear Mr Billings

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

Following my visit with Peter McKay, Additional Inspector, and John Leigh, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 March 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The combined school action plan and local authority statement of action is now fit for purpose.

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint a limited number of newly qualified teachers, after consultation with Her Majesty's Associate Inspector.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of

State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Halton.

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.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that students' achievement across the school accelerates rapidly, particularly in English, mathematics, geography and history, at GCSE and in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that teachers use all the information they have on students' capability to plan activities that will challenge students to think hard, deepen their understanding, awaken their curiosity, and raise their expectations of what can be achieved
 - ensuring that teachers maximise the opportunities in lessons to check their students' understanding, making sure that students have captured the key ideas in order to progress their learning
 - making sure that when teachers mark students' work, they focus on those aspects that will bring about the greatest gains in students' understanding in order to accelerate their progress, and then making sure that students act on this advice.

- Increase the proportion of students, and in particular disadvantaged students, making expected progress and more than expected progress in English and mathematics at GCSE, so that both measures are at least in line with national figures.

- As a matter of urgency improve the impact of leadership and management in improving the quality of teaching, and so raise standards of achievement by:
 - ensuring that the senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the school is doing, including the quality of teaching, is rigorous and robust and used to inform the priorities in the school development plan
 - ensuring governors use a range of sources of evidence on the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account
 - continuing to develop rigorous systems for monitoring students' progress across the school and in all subjects and using this information to target effective extra help for those students who are falling behind
 - using performance management to improve teachers' classroom practice and hold them rigorously to account for students' achievement
 - ensuring that improving the quality of teaching features as one of the key areas for improvement in the school development plan
 - ensuring that the information published on the school website meets statutory requirements.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations to the appropriate authority responsible for the school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the head of school, executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, members of staff with responsibility for subjects, members of staff with no additional responsibilities and four groups of students. The inspectors also met with two representatives of the governors' interim executive committee and spoke to the local authority representatives and the school challenge advisor. Twenty-five lesson observations were completed. A scrutiny of work across a full range of subjects was undertaken by the inspectors, alongside four senior leadership team representatives.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the executive headteacher has taken responsibility for the school and the governors have appointed a head of school. A teacher of science has joined the school and the previous headteacher and two teachers have left. The single central record has been amended accordingly.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of students forecasted to achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is expected to rise this year. The information the school has regarding students' achievement is much more reliable. As a result, the school has been able to intervene quickly when students have not achieved well enough. The school's own data predict a further rise in achievement in 2016 and beyond. Progress in Key Stage 3 has also improved across a range of subjects, but is inconsistent. The improvement is a result of better day-to-day teaching. There has been a strong focus on marking and feedback, which is starting to have an impact in some lessons.

A much more robust system of target-setting and tracking of student progress has been introduced. This, together with recent moves to raise the profile of assessment, is beginning to have an impact at Key Stages 3 and 4 and it is expected that comparisons of students' standards of attainment with the partner National Support School will contribute to raising standards further and help prepare students better for external assessments.

Intervention sessions in English and mathematics have plugged the gap in students' knowledge, ensuring that they have a better chance of achieving their potential. The progress students are expected to make in mathematics is not as high as in English, according to the latest assessments. The attainment gap between students who are supported by the pupil premium and those who are not is narrowing, but it is still wide.

Students in the sixth form have responded well to recent improvements in teachers' planning and management of their lessons, which, they say, now have a more structured approach which caters more effectively for differing, preferred learning styles.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has been a focus for improvement in the school. Students are now making more progress in lessons. The school has set up a systematic set of working practices for the teachers to improve their practice and this is starting to have an impact on the quality of teaching. Improving marking and tailoring lessons to meet the needs of all students has been a major focus of the professional development provided for staff. More needs to be done to embed the improvement and make sure the best practice is spread across the school. As a result of some extensive training, there are some examples of conscientious marking which is personalised and supportive.

A large number of teachers are very enthused about the recently introduced framework for improving teaching, but not all are applying all the principles consistently to meet the needs of the learners in their classes.

Overall, the quality of teaching is still too variable. The amount of inadequate teaching has been dramatically reduced, but there is still too much teaching that is not yet good enough. This is particularly so where students' progress is not being tracked carefully enough. In lessons where learning is weaker, effective matching of students' learning to their needs is often lacking, activities are undemanding and lack challenge; consequently these issues restrict the level of attainment that could be achieved by students. In addition, weaknesses in conceptual understanding, which inhibit learning, are not tackled robustly enough. Slow pace and repetition of activities can also act as barriers to progress. Where learning is strong, teachers seize opportunities to model learning and there is good verbal and written feedback, which students act upon to develop their understanding. In the lessons where students make the best learning, teachers skilfully identify and secure key learning points during learning activities, particularly after group work, to ensure that all learners achieve secure understanding.

Some teachers use information about their students' progress to plan and teach lessons that ensure further progress for all. Leaders are aware that they need to embed this practice. Progress data are now more reliable and are being used to hold teachers and subject leaders to account for the progress students make. Where it is fully utilised in planning, lessons are effective in driving learning forward, but in some areas there is still a need to raise teachers' expectations of what students can achieve.

Almost all teachers are marking with the intent of explaining strengths and providing points for improvement and very little work is unmarked. However, there is a variation in format and, therefore, effectiveness. The best examples are where

strengths and improvement points are clearly separated and are written in terms relating to subject-specific guidance. The school is working to improve students' responses to teacher feedback and has made some progress. However, much more needs to be done to embed this. A robust system for reviewing the quality and effectiveness of has been introduced which is extremely effective and exemplary practice.

The quality and amount of homework is variable. The school recognises this and has plans to address the situation.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour was judged to be good at the last inspection and has remained so. Behaviour management systems are in place and are used consistently. Students' attitudes to learning are good and the school is calm, with a purposeful atmosphere. Students are polite and respectful. The building is well kept, with little or no sign of litter.

Attendance has improved significantly, due to the targeted work of the attendance and inclusion team. Ambitious targets for future attendance levels have been set.

Many students are keen to learn. Instances of low-level disruption are rare, and only occur when teaching is poor. Students are happy to talk about the improvements they have seen in the school. They are clear that good behaviour is important for them to learn and make progress in lessons.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

Members of the leadership team are ambitious for the school and united in their desire to improve as quickly as possible. This ambition is shared by the governors, the local authority and the dioceses. However, they are equally keen that this improvement is sustainable and do not want a quick fix, which would see the school decline in future years. The new systems and strategies, which were being introduced at the time of the last monitoring visit, have had a renewed impetus and are starting to take effect.

Lesson observations are completed regularly and, as a result, bespoke packages of support are in place for some teachers to enable them to improve their teaching and for their students to make better progress. Middle leaders are benefiting from some training to enable them to challenge and hold their colleagues to account for students' progress. Senior leaders are accurate in their judgements about the progress students make and clear about how teaching has an impact on this progress.

The school's structures and systems for managing the performance of its staff are now much more evidence based and systematic and now need to be further developed by giving middle leaders even more responsibility for driving the

improvement in the quality of teaching. There is some very good teaching in the school and the sharing of this good work within and between subject areas is improving, particularly through regular professional development sessions. The Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body meet weekly and the interim executive committee fortnightly. They focus on the students' outcomes and hold the leadership of the school to account for the improvements required. However, they are not unrealistic and while understanding that there is a long way to go, are planning to build on the positive start. Stronger leadership, reliable data and learning have been the focus for improvement.

The school improvement plan is comprehensive and is looked at regularly to ensure that the improvement milestones are met. Where issues have not been addressed, they are highlighted as a priority for action.

The school has an accurate view of the progress made since the last inspection and senior leaders know that there still remains much room for improvement.

The school intends to do more to listen to the views of its students by making the school council more effective in gathering and reporting student views. Students report that there is a need to raise the council's profile and make it more representative and democratic.

External support

The National Support School is the main source of support. The executive headteacher has had a galvanising impact. He leads both St Chad's and the National Support School and has done much to improve the standards of teaching and learning and improving data. Consultants from the National Teaching School have also been used to work in subject areas to drive up the quality of teaching.

Any lingering resentment or concerns about the school's placement in special measures appear to have been allayed and the staff and governors are ready for the challenges that lie ahead.