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Mr Anthony Boyle
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic College
Wallasey Village
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CH45 3LN

Dear Mr Boyle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Catholic College, Wirral

Following my visit to your school on 26 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 second 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. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- strengthen the implementation of actions to ensure improvements are rapid and sustained
- ensure a culture of high expectations and high aspirations informs all aspects of the school's work.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, students, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school

improvement plan, self-evaluation documentation, the pupil premium action plan and achievement data were evaluated.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit a teacher of mathematics has left the school. The acting head of mathematics, a teacher of English, the deputy special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator and another teacher of mathematics are leaving the school at the end of the spring term. A teacher of drama and a teacher of English have recently joined the school.

Main findings

In response to the recommendations outlined in the previous monitoring inspection letter, senior leaders and governors have taken appropriate actions to support the school towards becoming good. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation documentation are much improved; teachers and middle leaders have received further training to improve teaching and learning and the student voice has been strengthened.

Following a review of the school's use of the pupil premium fund an action plan is now in place. The plan is clear and detailed with a useful focus on identifying barriers to learning. Leaders and governors have begun to consider how to develop an improved culture of learning in the school. Short and long-term plans are in place to address students' aspirations, particularly for the most disadvantaged. Governors have discussed how the school can re-focus on its school mission statement which includes the pledge to 'create a learning culture which allows all to achieve their potential'.

Recent improvements in teaching and learning have begun to impact on students' achievement. Externally moderated teacher assessments highlighted a tendency for teachers to be overgenerous in their judgments of progress and, as a result, these assessments have been re-adjusted. Despite these re-adjustments, recent controlled assessments indicate significant improvements in a range of subjects including English, science and modern foreign languages but in some subjects such as mathematics the improvements are less marked.

The school understands the need to improve teaching and learning at Key Stage 3. In particular, how well students engage with their learning so that improvements are sustainable and become embedded. To support this, the school has appointed literacy and numeracy coordinators and are applying a more focused approach to the way 'Year 7 catch up' funds are used to ensure positive outcomes.

The students that I met with reported that lessons are now more challenging and the quality of marking and feedback they receive continues to improve. Although many lessons are now more engaging it remains the case that too many are

disrupted by the poor behaviour of a minority. To address this, teachers are becoming more accountable for behaviour and progress in their lessons and support plans are in place for those who are unable to consistently achieve good progress and behaviour.

The majority of students are now aware of the role of the student council and all spoken with appreciated the feedback they receive in assemblies in response to student consultations.

It remains the case that students in Key Stage 3 are not receiving adequate careers education, information, advice and guidance in accordance with the school's statutory responsibilities.

Students in the sixth form remain very positive about the teaching, learning, guidance and support they receive.

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 range of initiatives in place at the time of the previous monitoring visit is on-going and the impact on student achievement is beginning to show. Teachers in the mathematics and English departments have visited a local teaching school to observe good practice; a national leader of education has helped the school improve the way it tracks students' progress; there is continued consultant support for the science department; and the school has undergone a 'mini' inspection by another school as part of Ofsted's 'Through the Lens' programme.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, The Education Funding Agency and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer

Her Majesty's Inspector