

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment
Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566863

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: j.bennett@cfbt.com



01 May 2015

Mr Martyn Campbell (Principal)
St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Centre for Learning (VA)
Cumber Lane
Whiston
Liverpool
Merseyside
L35 2XG

Dear Mr Campbell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Centre for Learning (VA), Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 30 April 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 January 2015. 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:

- sharpen up the post-inspection action plan by providing a greater focus on intended impact on students' learning and progress. The governing body should use more precise milestones to evaluate effectiveness of action taken
- involve more staff in leading actions, spreading responsibility for change across the school, with senior staff monitoring and evaluating
- give more scope to the senior leadership team by appointing an extra person from outside the school early this term on a temporary basis, rather than waiting for new posts to be filled from September
- improve attendance of disadvantaged pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10, by using figures on attendance and behaviour in the action plan to set short and medium term targets.

Evidence

During the visit I met you, the senior leadership team, five members of the governing body, representatives of the local authority and of the archdiocese to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school post-inspection action plan, with supporting information about students' progress, attendance and behaviour and careers education. I met a group of heads of subject departments about their role in the action plan and in changes since inspection. As a joint activity with them, I looked at a sample of students' work in Key Stage 3, their assessments and teachers' curriculum plans. I then met a large group of students in Year 9.

Main findings

The action plan begins with targets for the next two years for GCSE and for improvements to progress throughout the school in Key Stage 3, for a range of pupil groups and in all subjects. This comprehensive target setting shows senior leaders responding to issues identified in the inspection in relation to Key Stage 3. In the opening pages, achievement figures are used well. The most recent GCSE results were above national average but the school has recognised that students should make better progress from the time they enter.

However, performance information is not used thoroughly in the main body of the plan. Milestones and success criteria are too descriptive or focus on processes (such as writing policy, holding meetings or distributing information), rather than on outcomes for students' learning. Clearer use of milestones that can be measured would support governors in their responsibility to monitor progress on the plan.

Within the action plan, a large number of the steps are assigned to a small number of senior leaders, leaving too little time for them to take a more strategic role in driving, monitoring and evaluating improvement. Discussion with heads of subject departments, and the professionalism of their approach to scrutiny of students' work that they carried out with me, showed that responsibility for leading actions could be spread much more widely across the staff. A more distributed approach, with sharper short and medium term targets, would better enable staff to take full ownership of parts of the plan.

Sampling of students work showed that actions to improve marking are starting to have a positive impact. Students write regularly and have plenty of work in their books, including in lower sets. I saw work showing that teachers in science, history and mathematics give attention to spelling of key words, specialist vocabulary, organisation of work, and basic punctuation. As a result, students' presentation of work and standards of literacy across a range of subjects are sound. There was some evidence of progress in numeracy skills used in other subjects, such as a student improving his use of charts and tables in science but, in general, numeracy appears to be less developed across the curriculum.

Reading their work, students in Year 9 are covering bold and interesting topics, including informed critique of reality television, genetics and disease, algebra and World War II. Where teachers' comments give specific guidance, students are responding to marking to improve their work. Books in English showed some challenging work being set, including in middle and lower sets.

There have been no permanent exclusions from the school for some years. Attendance is below average but has improved over the longer term since 2012. However, at the time of my visit, attendance of disadvantaged pupils was markedly lower than for others in Years 8, 9 and 10. Fixed term exclusions were also highest in Years 8 and 9. The action plan does not analyse data or set detailed targets for attendance and behaviour as it does for achievement. Governors and senior staff have written to parents and sharpened up on attendance procedures. Overall attendance has gone up compared to the same time last year.

Actions to address low level disruption identified in the inspection report are starting to bear fruit. Heads of subject departments are enthusiastic about their new roles in tracking behaviour referrals in class and supporting staff and pupils where issues arise. The students I spoke to said that there still is some misbehaviour (such as clicking pens or chatting) in a sizeable minority of classes. However, they have noticed recent improvement, particularly when lessons are more practical, such as in the new science laboratories. Students can see a clear purpose to their work, which motivates them to behave well.

Students were able to give many recent examples of where teachers and school leaders have spotted and prevented bullying, such as name-calling or internet bullying. They feel that staff treat students fairly and are very approachable. Students could tell me who to approach and what to do to prevent bullying. They said that they feel secure in school as there is always a staff presence. Governors too gave convincing and recent examples of how they had taken action on bullying and misbehaviour, and clearly see this as an important part of the school's ethos. The school provided recent and clear case studies of support for vulnerable pupils and of liaison with other agencies.

Initially, governors were surprised by the inspection outcome but have rallied to form a monitoring board to track and drive improvement, with the local authority and diocese invited. As part of this role, the new board has met with groups of students to find out their views about behaviour, and have written to pupils and parents. As a result, levels of awareness about positive behaviour are high amongst students and teachers. In response to inspection, governors asked that marking policy be revised. Early impact can be seen in work books in some subjects. If teachers' comments are specific about next steps, students respond well.

Governors have agreed a new senior structure with a larger senior team and national recruitment. However, post-holders would not be in place until September at the earliest. There is no guarantee that posts will be filled or that they will know the school. A member of the senior team retires at the end of term, placing more

weight on the already small team. The original inspection was in January. September is too long to wait for this extra impetus and bringing in of outside ideas.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The main sources of support to the school are Knowsley local authority and the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The local authority carried out a review of the school before inspection with a clear written judgement. Since inspection, support on behaviour and attendance including in-school training has been effective in sharpening up practice and giving teachers more insight into why attendance matters. Input from senior education staff and personnel have enabled the school to form and advertise a new senior structure. A representative of the archdiocese has visited the school twice and is in the process of identifying strategic support from within Catholic schools in the diocese to join the senior team.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector