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30 April 2015

Mrs Mary Page
Headteacher
St Bernard's Catholic High School
Rating Lane
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA13 9LE

Dear Mrs Page

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St Bernard's Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 29 April 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.

This was the third monitoring visit since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses, following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria and the Director of the Education Service for the Diocese of Lancaster.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in all subjects, but most especially in English, by:
 - raising staff's expectations of what students can achieve and how their work should be presented
 - ensuring that teachers identify clearly the key concepts, skills and knowledge to be gained, and the steps which will ensure secure learning and progression
 - using information from assessment to ensure that all learning is at the right level of challenge, particularly for the most able students
 - sharing best practice in managing students' behaviour and in encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and behaviour
 - improving the quality of marking so students know exactly what they need to do to lift the quality of their work, and that effort and progress are being acknowledged.

- Accelerate students' progress in all subjects but most especially in English by:
 - raising the profile of English throughout the school and across the curriculum so that students see value in developing their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills and are motivated by seeing displays of high quality work from all year groups
 - identifying gaps and persistent weaknesses in students' reading and writing skills at year group, set and individual levels, and ensuring all staff take action to resolve them and narrow the achievement gap for those students supported by pupil premium funding ensuring that members of the English department work effectively together to boost students' progress.

- Improve the impact of leadership at all levels in driving improvement by:
 - ensuring that all staff embrace the need for urgent change and readily implement agreed policies and practices
 - holding firmly to account all senior and middle leaders for students' progress, the quality of provision and the carrying through of development plans
 - injecting even more rigour, frequency and critical evaluation into the monitoring of teaching and its impact on students' learning.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29 April 2015

Evidence

The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, two members of the governing body and a representative from the diocese. He also held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. Along with members of the senior leadership team, he conducted joint observations of parts of eight lessons, during which he spoke to students and looked at their books. He also held a meeting with nine pupils, chosen at random from Years 7 to 11. He examined the single central record of staff and a range of documentation, including reports of reviews of the school's work, conducted by the senior leadership team and external consultants.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has appointed new heads of department in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Three teachers have left the school and three newly qualified teachers have been appointed who will take up post in September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the last monitoring inspection, the senior leadership team has further grown in strength. Its members work very closely together and are making very good use of their complementary skills to bring about further improvements in the school. The headteacher provides strong, determined but sensitive leadership based on clear priorities. Having tackled the shortcomings in English, she is now focusing on the need to ensure consistent leadership across all subject areas. The effective systems that are now in place for gathering and analysing data, for monitoring performance and for providing additional support where necessary, provide a very firm basis for this work.

The governors continue to be closely involved in the work of the school and in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Their investment in additional pastoral support is having a continuing impact on improving attendance and reducing incidents of serious misbehaviour. The gap between the performance of disadvantaged students eligible for additional government funding (pupil premium) and that of other students in the school continues to narrow. However, the measures for determining the impact of pupil premium expenditure are not sufficiently precise. The school's special educational needs policy does not cover all the required areas in sufficient detail and the removal of some pupils from lessons to attend booster classes in literacy means that their access to some subjects is reduced.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school's data indicate that the clear improvements in GCSE results achieved last year are likely to be maintained and extended further this year.
- The new English team is now well established. Results in English continue to improve and, under the leadership of the head of department, the subject now has a high profile within the school.
- The school's analysis indicates that, since the appointment of a new head of mathematics, there have already been improvements in standards in the subject.
- The standards of behaviour around the school continue to be high.
- Monitoring by external consultants indicates that the quality of teaching continues to improve, although it is not yet consistently good. The observations conducted during this inspection support this view.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of leadership of non-core subjects is not consistently good.
- Lesson observations conducted by external consultants, as well as during this inspection, indicate that there is further work to be done to improve the quality of questioning, marking and presentation and to ensure that all pupils are consistently engaged in lessons.

External support

Senior leaders have made very good use of support from the local authority, the diocese and from external consultants to help gain an independent view of the school's progress. The school's improvement partner is providing good support in tackling weaknesses in subject leadership.

Priority for improvement

The school should take immediate action to:

- revise the special educational needs policy so that it meets requirements.