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12 June 2015

Mr P Mooney
Executive Headteacher
Leyland St Mary's Catholic High School
Royal Avenue
Leyland
Lancashire
PR25 1BS

Dear Mr Mooney

Special measures monitoring inspection of Leyland St Mary's Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school with Andrew Williams, Additional Inspector, on 10 and 11 June 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 October 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 school is making reasonable progress to the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection with the understanding that appropriate external support is provided following a risk assessment exercise.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Anne Pontifex
Associate Inspector

Annex

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance by:
 - improving communication between governors, school leaders and staff to rebuild broken relationships so staff can work as a cohesive team with a unity of purpose
 - reducing staff absence so that students' learning is not disrupted and is more consistent
 - monitoring teaching more rigorously and ensuring that teachers are perfectly clear about which aspects need to be improved, in order to eradicate teaching that leads to progress which is less than good
 - developing the role of leaders in charge of subjects so that they are more accountable for the quality of teaching in their departments and for the progress their students make
 - providing governors with clear information about the progress of all groups of students in all subjects in all years, so that governors are able to hold the school to account more effectively for students' academic performance
 - checking regularly that strategies for improvement undertaken by the school are having the desired impact
 - ensuring that the school's website is compliant with the Department for Education regulations
 - responding to the letter received from the Department for Education in January 2014 requiring that an external review be carried out into the performance of disadvantaged students and ensuring that governors act swiftly on any recommendations of that review
 - improving the behaviour of a small minority of students, including some who attend part-time provision off site
 - checking that students are taught how to keep themselves and others safe
 - communicating with parents more effectively to restore their confidence in the school.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all students, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those of middle and lower ability, and those who are disabled or have special educational needs, achieve well in all subjects, especially in science and humanities, by:
 - making sure that teachers set targets for students that are appropriately challenging, and reviewing those targets regularly
 - planning and teaching lessons that meet the needs of all students

- raising teachers' expectations of students' capabilities, in order to ensure that the work students are given to do stretches them, makes them think hard and deepens their understanding
- taking immediate steps to address gaps in students' knowledge and understanding in order to make up for weaknesses in teaching over time
- ensuring that marking gives specific advice on how students can improve their work and providing students with opportunities to respond to the advice given
- insisting that all students take a pride in the presentation and quality of work they produce.

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 management may be improved.

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

Report on the second monitoring visit on 10 and 11 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, other members of staff and representatives of the local authority and archdiocese. Inspectors observed students in social spaces, such as the dining hall, and spoke to students informally at break and lunchtime. Inspectors scrutinised samples of students' work and examined a range of documents including records of attendance and behaviour, governing body meeting minutes and information on student progress.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher has resigned. Twenty staff are leaving at the end of the summer term having secured promoted posts elsewhere or having taken retirement/redundancy opportunities. Some of the leaving staff are temporary teachers. Six posts need to be filled to make a full staffing complement for September. The new building is on schedule to open for the start of the new academic year.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Aspirations for all have been raised at Leyland St Mary's Catholic High School. Data provided by school leaders on the predicted performance of Year 11 students in the 2015 national testing indicate a potential improvement, when compared to results achieved last academic year. This anticipated improvement in both attainment and progress measures is being driven by the promotion of aspirational targets and improved teacher knowledge with regards to data and expectations. However, figures across many subjects remain stubbornly below national benchmarks with science and information and communication technology needing specific attention. Whole-school progress while moving at a pace is not rapid enough for all young people. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on the progress and achievement of students in Key Stage 3 to ensure positive outcomes at the end of both key stages.

The school's data highlights a widening gap in the underperformance of groups of students, namely those from disadvantaged backgrounds, boys in comparison to girls, less able students, the disabled and those with special educational needs. The action plans in place for each of these cohorts will require detailed monitoring, review and evaluation to ensure success.

The quality of teaching and learning

Inspectors observed a number of lessons and confirmed senior leaders' views that the quality of teaching across subjects is improving but the picture remains mixed and it is not strong enough to raise standards and progress rapidly for all students.

The school has some strong teaching taking place. In lessons where better learning was seen, it was well planned, creative and engaging for all students. Teaching in a physical education lesson observed ensured engagement for all, even a non-participant who was charged with using an iPad to record performance and coaching points. Equally in English, love for the subject area and passion were infectious and as such, created a tangible electric atmosphere for a Year 7 group.

Observations revealed that generally pupil engagement was high, a keen interest in learning was witnessed which was enhanced by positive relationships.

The whole-school approach towards marking has started to have an impact; quality feedback to students is now visible. However, this practice remains inconsistent across the school. Aspirations are being raised and this is now notable in the presentation of students' work in many curriculum areas.

New systems have been introduced to share good practice through a systematic and structured staff training programme. A more positive climate for staff discussion and sharing has been established. Rigorous monitoring is also helping to support improvement alongside the newly formed teaching and learning group.

Improved staff attendance and reduced reliance on supply teachers is having a positive impact on classroom practice. In lessons where the challenge and progress for all students was limited, opportunities were missed to let students have sufficient time to practise and apply the learning they have made. Students told inspectors that 'dull' lessons were characterised by teachers talking too much.

The role of teaching assistants in lessons varies. In order to ensure the most positive outcomes for young people their role needs to be reviewed and evaluated. Teaching assistants, teachers and students would benefit from a clear understanding of the role.

The executive headteacher has identified historic weaknesses in the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs; the process of addressing these issues has begun.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the inspection the students were courteous and friendly. One student spoken to during the visit explained, 'that the press perception of a troubled school was unfair and that this was actually an improving school with work still to be done'.

Behaviour around the school, in public areas and on corridors is calm and orderly.

Few behavioural issues were seen during the inspection, however, students' learning behaviours were observed to be poor when teaching lacked pace and challenge. Such teaching failed to engage students and resulted in their poor concentration and compliance. This inconsistency is preventing behaviour from being consistently good.

However, the situation is improving and time is now needed to embed and develop new systems. The new pastoral system will be central to this area of school development. In lessons which were challenging, well planned, exciting and fun, no behaviour issues were witnessed.

Students reported that they feel safe and that they did not have any concerns about bullying and that the school provides good support for anyone experiencing difficulties.

Attendance figures are in line with national figures. Punctuality to morning school and between lessons has improved noticeably across the school.

Students demonstrated and articulated pride in their school and trust in the executive headteacher.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The current picture of the school is one of improved morale and positive attitude.

The executive headteacher brings inspirational leadership which combined with passion, vision, energy and accountability has galvanised the staff ensuring that self-belief and self-confidence provide a unity of purpose for all at Leyland St Mary's Catholic High School to move forward in a positive manner.

Inspection evidence indicates the school's capacity for improvement has increased and that there is now a more purposeful ethos with regards to school improvement which is no longer hindered by a wide range of personnel issues. Senior leadership is now more purposeful. Team members are now aware that they have to model outstanding practice in all aspects of school life.

However, senior leaders can, at times, lack consistency in approaches to line management tasks. To ensure the best possible outcomes for young people, it is important for all leaders to have clarity on what constitutes the basic expectations in terms of challenge and support for the areas that they line manage.

The leadership's ability at all levels to improve the school is mixed. It is though, becoming increasingly more effective and, as a result, the impact is beginning to be seen in the improving quality of teaching and the progress of students. However, it is clear that there is still a long way to go.

The executive headteacher has brokered additional support and challenge for subject leaders via a series of departmental self-evaluation health checks. These have been validated by external specialists and further developed by the drawing up of subject development plans, the success of which is reliant on the monitoring by senior line managers.

Plans are in place to strengthen pastoral leadership. As such, the leadership's capacity for pastoral intervention and safeguarding has increased.

A curriculum review has been rapidly moved into action and the school from September will move to a 25 period week. This will provide a cost effective model which will reduce wasted time and lead to deeper learning opportunities for the students.

Communication has improved both within the school and externally. Email, text and Twitter opportunities have all been exploited to positive effect. A parent focus group has been established and this group now meets half termly.

The staff attendance profile has dramatically improved since January.

The governing body has been a key player in the school's progress since the last visit. It has worked in an open and transparent fashion, removing potential barriers to progress when possible and challenging leadership post holders with authority and confidence. Governors are currently analysing a skills audit, the findings of which will inform next year's governors' training programme.

External support

The archdiocese and local authority have a shared philosophy which centres on the concept of ensuring that the school is fully supported to move quickly and efficiently forward. As such, they have both provided support and challenge in order for the school to move to achieving this outcome.