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Mr Paul Dickinson
Interim Headteacher
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Eccleston
St Helens
Merseyside
WA10 4QH

Dear Mr Dickinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of De La Salle School

Following my visit with Andrew Henderson and Clive Hurren, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 17 and 18 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 December 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 towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, but only with my prior approval and in subject areas where leadership and management have the capacity for effective support.

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, the Director of Schools and Colleges for the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Director of Children's Services for St. Helens.

Yours sincerely

Julie Yarwood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least consistently good, by:
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of what their students can achieve are high enough and based upon an accurate understanding of students' starting points
 - making sure that all students, in particular the disadvantaged and most able, are sufficiently challenged in lessons so that they have to think hard about their work and so deepen their understanding
 - ensuring that senior leaders maximise opportunities to drive up standards of teaching, including sharing with their colleagues the good practice that already exists in the school
 - making sure that the marking of students' work is effective so that students are clear about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve, and that teachers ensure that students act on this advice.

- Improve attainment and progress, particularly at GCSE, in English and mathematics and especially for disadvantaged students, those of middle ability and the most able, by:
 - ensuring that the data collected by senior leaders on students' performance are accurate, reliable and used to inform the extra help students need to keep them on track to meet challenging targets.

- Improve students' attitudes to learning, by:
 - maximising opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning, including making sure that teachers set appropriate homework, so that students' reliance on their teachers is lessened and they develop the skills to learn effectively across the curriculum.

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - making sure that the monitoring and evaluation of how well the school is doing leads to decisive and rapid action to drive up standards
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan has a clear order of priorities, with appropriate timescales to enable staff and governors to identify which are the most important tasks that need to be done first in order to have the greatest and most rapid impact on students' outcomes
 - ensuring that careers advice and guidance provide students with precise information about the possible long-term impact of their subject option choices at Key Stage 4.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with the interim headteacher and interim associate headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers, four groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, a representative from the local authority, the seconded assistant headteacher, the lead practitioner for mathematics and a representative from the archdiocese. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including: the school improvement plan; minutes of governing body meetings and of the local authority school improvement board; data about the current achievement, attendance and behaviour of students; and documents relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. Inspectors observed learning in lessons and looked at students' exercise books in classrooms. They also scrutinised the work of students in Year 9. It was not possible to observe lessons in Year 11 as students were completing examinations at the time of the inspection; however, an inspector spoke with a group of students in Year 11. Inspectors visited morning tutorials and an assembly.

Context

A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up the post in September 2015. Two teachers of mathematics and one of art will be taking maternity leave from the beginning of the next academic year. One teacher of mathematics is retiring at the end of the summer term. As a result of changes to the curriculum, two additional teachers in English, one in mathematics and one in history have been appointed and will join the school in September. The school is in the process of appointing five permanent progress leaders from within the existing staff. In addition, two temporary senior leaders are being appointed from within school to bring extra capacity to the leadership team.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Data seen on inspection indicate that the proportion of students in Year 11 making expected progress in English and mathematics is higher than in 2014. Progress in English in particular across the school is now much stronger than previously and this was reinforced by evidence from observations in lessons and in students' work. In-school data indicate that the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their peers in Year 11 in English is now small. The proportions of students set to exceed expected progress show an improvement in both English and mathematics, but remain below national levels in mathematics. This is particularly the case for more-able students.

In mathematics, rates of progress are improving and in Year 11, the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers shows some evidence

of narrowing, but at a slower rate than in English. The current working levels for students in Year 10 in mathematics are not yet strong enough and leaders recognise the importance of applying the same rigour and additional assistance given to Year 11 recently to students in all year groups. Observations of lessons across the school in mathematics indicate improving levels of achievement overall, but there remains a need to accelerate progress to overcome a legacy of underachievement.

Extensive additional work has taken place with students to provide a carefully tailored programme of additional classes in a range of subjects. The improvements seen in the data for the present Year 11 students are due in no small part to these additional opportunities.

Students' work in English and mathematics has been externally moderated and this has helped to increase confidence in the reliability of the predictions.

Students' targets have been revised to ensure that they are stretching and students spoken to by an inspector commented that they now feel more challenged in their work. Targets set for some disadvantaged students are not yet high enough and these are being reviewed by school leaders.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors saw evidence of an improved awareness among teachers of students' starting points. They saw some examples of this information being used to provide high levels of challenge and appropriate extension tasks for students. Some effective questioning was also observed which challenged students to think hard about their work. A strong example of this was seen in a Year 9 history lesson where students were encouraged to reflect on the issue of bias in source materials. Effective questioning recognised and built on students' understanding and enhanced their learning significantly. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, the most able were challenged in their thinking on the topic of surds and, as a result, made strong progress. This level of challenge is not yet consistently embedded and some poor practice persists with the level of work set for students, being too low in some areas and opportunities to develop thinking through effective questioning missed.

The marking of students' work shows improvement. Inspectors saw evidence of some very effective marking, giving students specific guidance on how to improve their work. Examples of this were seen particularly in English where students were given clear feedback on the strengths and areas for development of their work. This advice was then acted on by students. There is still work to do to ensure that marking in all subject areas is of a consistently high quality and to make sure that students act on the advice given by their teachers.

Effective action is being taken to enable teachers to develop their skills by sharing each other's practice. Teachers welcome the new approach and say that they now

have more opportunities to share and discuss strategies with their peers and, as a result, are seeing better engagement in lessons. The programme of training is not yet strategically calendared for the full academic year; this is being put in place to start in September.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students, on the whole, engage positively with their learning and focus well in lessons. They work collaboratively and cooperatively with their peers and move around the school in a calm manner. Students are keen to learn and attend well; attendance is strong and improving.

Where teaching is less secure, students stray off task and their learning is disrupted. Students who were spoken to by inspectors said that some of their lessons are disturbed by poor engagement with learning. They commented that this is particularly the case when they do not have their usual teacher.

Students' exercise books provided evidence of positive attitudes to learning over time. There are, however, some instances of poor presentation of work and incomplete work which remain unchallenged.

Students view homework as valuable and worthwhile and they appreciate the steps that school leaders have taken to improve this aspect. A new online system has been introduced and students comment that, although there were some initial technical problems, these have been resolved. They comment that they value the new system as they and their parents are able to keep a clear check on the homework set. Students in Year 11 commented specifically on the fact that the new system enabled them to see when extra classes put on to help them were taking place. The new approach is helping students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, but it is too early to evaluate fully the impact on learning over time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Teachers comment that significant changes have been brought about by the leaders in school since the previous inspection. They explain that there are clearer roles, responsibilities and expectations from the senior leaders and morale in school is high. Teachers are clear about the priorities for the school and the progress towards targets, as identified in the school improvement plan, is shared with them.

Stronger processes for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching are now in place. A significant amount of work scrutiny and lesson observation has been conducted and processes are now implemented to tackle areas of identified weakness. The impact of this work is starting to be seen in the quality of teaching and particularly in the quality of marking. Some of the school's evaluations of the quality of teaching are still overgenerous; although evaluations take account of a

range of evidence, there is a need for a greater understanding of students' progress as a key factor when evaluating the success of teaching. The quality of teaching and learning provided when students do not have their regular teacher is not monitored closely enough and, as a result, students' progress is hampered.

A new system for tracking students' progress has been introduced and this has been warmly welcomed by staff. Training has taken place for all staff to provide them with the skills to use the new system and the first phase of incorporating the system into school processes has taken place. Moderation of students' work in departments has now started to take place to improve the reliability of progress data held by the school. Leaders have focused heavily on the progress of students in Year 11 and there is now a need to ensure that the rigorous and forensic tracking of progress data and subsequent additional help for students extend to all year groups and particularly to students in Key Stage 3. This approach is in place in English and is a key factor underpinning the enhanced levels of progress seen in this subject.

Middle leadership remains variable and there is a need to ensure that training takes place to equip all middle leaders with the skills to monitor the quality of learning and teaching in their department and to challenge where this is not strong enough.

School leaders have acted swiftly to tackle the issue of careers advice and guidance as identified in the recent inspection report. There is now a strong academic emphasis in the guidance given to students in Year 9 when they choose their option subjects. This emphasis is ensuring that students are aware of the implications of their choices and the importance of this in keeping their options open in the future. The curriculum has been reviewed and additional time has been allocated to English and mathematics in Key Stage 3 to support progress in these subjects further.

The system of tutoring has now been reviewed for all year groups and from September, all tutor groups will be year-group specific. Students in Year 11 commented that the move to this system for them earlier in the year helped to support their examination preparation. Progress leaders are currently being appointed to take on a leadership role for each of the year groups under the new tutoring arrangement. This will allow for the closer tracking of students' progress.

Governance of the school is increasingly strong. The introduction of the evaluation committee provides governors with a clearer mechanism for understanding the progress made by the school in the areas for improvement, the impact of actions taken and the evidence for this. Governors have recently nominated a specific member of the governing body to keep a close check on the progress made by disadvantaged students. Although the school tracks the progress of this group of students, governors do not currently receive data which show this specifically. This information is essential to enable governors to track progress robustly.

External support

The interim headteacher and interim associate headteacher have, in a relatively short period of time, managed to bring about significant changes in the school. These changes are having a very positive impact on the leadership and management of the school. There has been a culture shift in terms of the school's focus on the achievement of students and leaders; teachers are now firmly looking at the progress of students, rather than final GCSE headline measures. The local authority adviser provides extensive support to the school and this is commented on positively by senior leaders in school. The adviser provides senior leaders with advice and guidance which is increasing their knowledge, confidence and ability to perform their roles effectively. This support dovetails well with that provided by the interim headteachers. The local authority school improvement board holds school leaders to account for progress against the areas for improvement. It is clear from the minutes of the meeting and discussion with school leaders that this mechanism is providing effective support and challenge.

The seconded assistant headteacher and the temporary lead practitioner for mathematics have had an initial focus on raising the achievement of students in Year 11. They have liaised with teachers, parents and students and have provided extensive additional opportunities for students to take part in extra classes to boost their achievement. These additional opportunities are a key factor underpinning the predicted improvement in results for 2015.

School leaders are now looking more regularly beyond the school for advice. They are working closely with a local college to raise students' aspirations and have visited other local schools to seek additional external perspectives.