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11 January 2016

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

Dear Mr Mooney

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

Following my visit with Bernard Robinson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 December, 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 third 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:

### **Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

The school may appoint up to three newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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, a representative of the Roman Catholic

Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- 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.
  
- 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 third monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 December 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a group of middle leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, a foundation governor, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. Inspectors listened to the opinions of a wide range of pupils both formally and at social times. Inspectors spoke to four parents.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring visit, a significant number of staff have left. Some new staff have taken up post and others will be joining the school in January 2016. In September, staff and pupils moved into their brand new school building. The executive headteacher has recently been appointed to the substantive post of headteacher. A few staff were absent at the time of the inspection, including the special educational needs coordinator. There is an experienced acting special educational needs coordinator in post.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

The 2015, GCSE examination results were very disappointing and lower than the school had predicted; achievement remains inadequate. Targets for pupils' achievement were too low and teachers' assessment of their achievement was over-generous. There were significant gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers at Key Stage 4.

The progress of pupils currently attending the school shows an improving picture, particularly at Key Stage 3. Predictions for achievement at GCSE suggest that the proportion of pupils who are likely to gain five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, will be above the national average. Rigorous external moderation is now taking place so that performance information is more secure than was the case last year.

Pupils were observed making much better progress in a number of lessons due to the improvements in the leadership and management of teaching and learning. In a Year 8 science lesson, pupils were intrigued to discover the effects of smoking on the lungs. As a result of the teacher's expert subject knowledge, thorough planning and probing questions, pupils made rapid progress. They behaved very well because they were immersed in learning and had great respect for their teacher.

All Key Stage 3 pupils take part in a reading initiative led by the librarian to raise literacy levels. A number of pupils spoken to by inspectors showed good progress in

reading; many students were on their third or fourth novel of the term. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the novels they were reading and confidently explained the storylines.

Some teachers provide good support for writing but others leave pupils to flounder with insufficient structure and guidance for writing, spelling and grammar. Last year's literacy drive, funded by pupil premium, has not had the desired impact. Results in English fell and, on occasion, inspectors observed students around the school without adequate support for writing.

Disadvantaged pupils are making much better progress where the teaching is stronger, but gaps in achievement are not closing quickly enough because the day-to-day quality of teaching varies too much.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching is improving. Following a turbulent time when there were many temporary teachers in temporary buildings, pupils are now being taught in a stable, bright, stimulating learning environment. Some teaching is interesting and engaging because teachers understand the pupils' abilities and plan to make them think and help them learn. For example, in a Year 11 physical education (PE) lesson pupils were coached in ju-jitsu. They learned complex manoeuvres and honed their skills as a result of expert tuition from specialist instructors. The PE department uses regular, rigorous assessments to inform planning and, as a result, pupils achieve well over-time.

Similarly, in a Year 10 geography lesson, pupils were immersed in their learning about earthquakes. The teacher's excellent planning ensured that all pupils made rapid gains in their knowledge. Keywords and definitions were used well to allow them to write technically and accurately about the topic.

However, there remains a body of teaching which is bland, poorly planned and fails to capture pupils' interest – leading to lapses in engagement.

Some highly effective marking was seen in English, which prompted pupils to improve their work by thinking in more depth and reflecting on poetic techniques. However, the school's marking policy is not applied consistently and some feedback provided by teachers is less effective in its impact on pupils' progress.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils say that behaviour is getting better and inspectors agree with them. This is due to improved leadership, a strengthened pastoral team and effective joint working between many agencies.

Leaders' and teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are high and as a result the number of pupils who have received exclusions from school has increased: there have been three permanent exclusions. Pupils receive sanctions for minor misdemeanours, leading to much improved behaviour – particularly in Key Stage 3.

All pupils spoken to by inspectors were polite, well-mannered and good ambassadors for the school. They show an impressive sense of loyalty. Pupils look pristine in their uniforms and are proud to be part of the school community. These high standards are underpinned in a number of subjects including PE where students look equally smart and well presented in their kit.

Standards of behaviour are rising most quickly in Key Stage 3 where there are significantly fewer interruptions to lessons. Pupils are respectful to adults, including visitors. Year 7 pupils spoken to by inspectors say that they are pleased with their choice of school and enjoy attending St Mary's.

Behaviour at social times is orderly and pupils take responsibility for clearing away after lunch in the canteen. Lunchtime supervisors say that behaviour is typically good and they feel well supported by teachers and senior leaders.

Pupils say that bullying rarely happens and they are confident to know who to go to for help if they have a problem. However, policies for behaviour, bullying and child-protection need to be updated to reflect current practice in the school.

Attendance is similar to last year and is securely above the national average. The lowest attendance is in Years 8 and 9. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains below that of their peers. Punctuality to school is good and improving.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

The governing body is unflinching in its drive to improve standards for pupils. Governors are successfully building capacity among the senior leadership. Staff say that morale is improving and pupils and staff spoken to by inspectors hold the new headteacher in high regard; they welcome his clear direction and good communication.

All pupils spoken to by inspectors feel that the school is improving. There is a clear vision for what must be done, a sense of urgency and a very honest and accurate self-evaluation. The re-building of the school has been less about the new classrooms and more about creating a harmonious community.

The headteacher, along with members of the governing body is relentless in his drive to eradicate weak teaching and drive up standards. Leaders and governors were shocked and disappointed by the 2015 GCSE results, but have responded swiftly and robustly by challenging middle leaders on the quality of their

assessments. This is still very much work in progress as assessment information is not yet completely reliable.

The Chair of the Governing Body has rightly challenged the school's use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. While there has been some positive impact from last year, for example in raising attendance for a small group of pupils and supporting engagement in PE, there has been no root and branch evaluation of the impact. There is no incisive plan for the coming year.

Members of the governing body are challenging school leaders appropriately about the achievement of different groups, but these robust challenges are not always reflected in the minutes of meetings.

The newly appointed senior leader for teaching and learning has been pivotal in bringing a renewed vigour to the team. There are now robust systems in place to monitor teaching, assessment and marking. Staff training has focused on literacy support and planning for different needs. Leaders are addressing why it is that some teachers still do not use this training in practice.

The leadership and management of special educational needs are improving. Parents spoken to by inspectors say that they appreciate the recent support their children have received, although they are frustrated that support was not put in place earlier.

Performance management is used well and a number of staff were denied pay progression because the standards reached by pupils in their classes were not high enough. Performance management targets are used particularly well to raise the attendance of a specific small group of disadvantaged pupils.

Although there are clear strengths in middle leadership, there are too many departments where standards remain low. Curriculum reviews have been introduced for senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account. However, there has been little quality assurance of these reviews and opportunities have been missed to challenge middle leaders robustly.

The quality and analysis of assessment information remains an area of concern. There are plans in place to build capacity and train staff so that information can be used more incisively to target the achievement of specific groups. This aspect of leadership needs to be strengthened urgently so that resources can be targeted to best effect and the impact can be closely monitored.

### **External support**

The archdiocese and local authority have provided good support for the school. The biggest impact, apart from that of the permanent appointment of the executive



headteacher, has been from the secondment of an assistant headteacher from a Lancashire school to lead on teaching and learning. Help with behaviour is certainly having an impact and staff welcome the support from other schools. Newly qualified teachers have been well supported by a number of professionals from different schools. There is evidence that external support is building a better capacity, particularly at senior leadership level.