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30 October 2015

Mrs Joanne Meredith
Headteacher
St Anne's Roman Catholic High School
Glenfield Road
Heaton Chapel
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Cheshire
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Dear Mrs Meredith

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Anne's Roman Catholic High School

Following my visit with Jonathan Jones, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 October 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 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:

The school is not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint 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, the diocese of Salford and the Director of Children's Services for Stockport.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

Improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, in order to drive improvements in teaching and students' achievement, by:

- ensuring that leaders at all levels have the expertise and focus to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching, students' achievement and behaviour, and that they hold teachers to account for their performance
- eradicating weak teaching, which over time has a negative impact on students' learning
- ensuring the pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of those students it is intended to support
- ensuring that governors hold school leaders to account effectively regarding the quality of teaching, students' achievement and behaviour
- improving the curriculum so it ensures all students develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need to achieve well.

Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so it is at least consistently good and accelerates students' rate of progress particularly in English and mathematics by ensuring that:

- all teachers provide students with activities that challenge them to achieve their best
- all students are keen to learn and are encouraged to answer challenging questions about what they are being taught
- teachers mark students' books consistently and well, in order to provide them with the information and advice they need to improve their work and check that students act upon this feedback
- staff raise their expectations of students' achievement and insist that all students' work is completed and presented to a high standard.

Raise standards in English and mathematics for all students, but particularly for boys and disadvantaged students, so that they are at least in line with those expected nationally by:

- providing a very clear and effective structure, which is followed by all staff, for the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills, including comprehension, grammar and spelling, across the curriculum, from Year 7 through to Year 11
- further developing older students' personal reading
- ensuring high expectations of boys' achievement.

Improve students' behaviour and their attitudes to their work by:

- dealing consistently and robustly with low level disruptive behaviour in some lessons and occasional boisterous behaviour around the school site
- ensuring, through improvements to teaching that all students are working well and challenged in their learning and motivated to succeed.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 October 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with a number of people, including: the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team; groups of students, both formally and informally; the Chair and other members of the Governing Body; representatives from the local authority, including a member of staff responsible for health and safety in Stockport schools, and the diocese; the current directors of teaching and learning for English and mathematics, and the Fire Safety Officer from the Stockport Fire Service.

Context

Prior to the previous monitoring inspection, the former head of the mathematics department had left the school. A new director of teaching and learning in mathematics has recently been appointed who will take up this position next term. An assistant head of the English department has been appointed. The senior leadership team has been extended to include the directors of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science. Staffing has been reduced in the religious education department. Furthermore, there have been some changes to staffing in science, information, communication technology and design and technology. The school is in the process of changing its school improvement partner in order to provide more challenge to senior leaders.

During this monitoring inspection, the fire alarm was set off maliciously and there was an evacuation of school buildings. HMI had concerns about the safety of students during this procedure and hence immediate contact was made with Stockport Fire Service and the local authority's safeguarding team, who then visited the school on the second day of the inspection. The representative of the Fire Service advised that students were not at any immediate risk of harm and that the school's guidance for evacuation in the event of fire, if followed correctly, meets requirements. The Fire Service and the local authority health and safety officer have arranged to revisit the school in the very near future.

Outcomes for pupils

This year's GCSE examination results were a huge disappointment to the school. According to school leaders, predictions for GCSE examinations taken in 2015 represented a rise on previous years. However, this optimistic picture did not materialise and the proportion of students who achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, dropped markedly on 2014. This is largely because students' performance in both English and geography was poor, and students also underachieved in other subjects, such as design technology.

The gap between disadvantaged students and others both nationally and in the school has widened in English, but narrowed slightly in mathematics. The proportion of disadvantaged students gaining a good grade in both English and mathematics has dropped, therefore the gap between these students and other students nationally has widened in this key measure.

The proportion of students in 2015 who took GCSE examinations in a suite of rigorous, academic subjects was substantially lower than typically seen nationally, especially given students' prior attainment, which was broadly average. This is indicative of the school's low expectations of students' potential in the past. School leaders have altered the curriculum so that in the future a greater proportion of students will be encouraged to study such subjects.

The school has yet to collect information on students' progress since the beginning of the academic year, therefore predictions for next year's GCSEs remain purely speculative. Evidence gleaned from the recent examination results, lesson observations and the work in students' books strongly suggests that there has been a decline in students' outcomes since the previous inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inspectors conducted a thorough and extensive examination of students' work across a range of subjects and year groups. As noted at the previous inspection, standards of presentation are often poor and sometimes students' books are marred by graffiti and doodling. In many books the quality of marking and assessment remains woefully weak, inconsistent and utterly ineffective in helping students to make gains in their learning.

Teachers' comments and suggestions are frequently ignored by students, leading to repeated mistakes. For example, in one exercise book the teacher had reminded the student on at least two occasions earlier in the term that in Spanish one uses small letters, not capitals, to write the days of the week and the months of the year; the student had not taken this advice and was still doing the contrary.

Many students' books in mathematics had not been marked with any degree of rigour since the beginning of term and there was little evidence to suggest that numeracy skills were being supported across other subjects. In some science books, the only work that had been corrected formed part of an assessment; according to the marks awarded, most students were well below target.

Marking in English was of marginally better quality overall and this was echoed by students spoken to by inspectors. Across other subjects, spelling mistakes, although identified, frequently remained uncorrected leading to repeated errors. In this way, the opportunity to enhance students' literacy skills is often missed.

Inspectors also talked to many students about their progress and their experience of teaching in this school. Students' opinions were mixed, with some students speaking favourably of their teachers and others feeling frustrated by what they claimed to be a lack of emphasis on learning. This mixed picture of the overall quality of teaching was reflected in the sample of lessons observed during the inspection.

The school's own evaluation of the quality of teaching is over-generous and does not concur with inspection findings. This is because school leaders do not put sufficient emphasis on the impact of teaching on learning when they make their judgements. Procedures to identify and challenge underperformance are laborious; they have proved ineffective in rooting out remaining weaknesses in teaching.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous inspection, the rate of exclusion has decreased substantially. School leaders have established a clear system to improve behaviour and, according to most students spoken to by inspectors, this is having a positive effect. However, during the visit low-level disruption in some lessons remained a serious impediment to students' learning.

Students are, on the whole, polite and friendly. They appreciate the efforts that some teachers make to help them with their studies. The good attitudes shown by the majority are not, however, universal. During the visit, a small minority of students were rude and disrespectful to both staff and inspectors, for example by spitting chewing gum onto the ground, swearing and leaving litter around the site.

Students say that, for the most part, they feel safe. Nevertheless, several students complained to inspectors that there is a considerable amount of bullying, including that of a racist or homophobic nature, which persists, despite school leaders' attempts to stop it. Cyber-bullying was cited as particularly troublesome, even though students learn about the potential dangers of such cruel and inconsiderate behaviour in lessons and assemblies.

Attendance is poor and persistent absenteeism is more than twice the national average. School leaders have established more rigorous systems to improve attendance, but it is too early to see any impact of actions so far taken. Such poor attendance remains a substantial obstacle to the removal of special measures.

Students in Year 11 receive a modicum of guidance on higher education and careers. However, as students generally are lower down the school when they pick their option subjects, this information is provided too late for them to make informed choices about the next stages in their lives. Students spoke willingly with inspectors about their hopes and dreams for the future; sadly, very few had any realistic notion of how to achieve them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

School leaders do not demonstrate convincingly that they have the impetus or sense of urgency required to turn this school around. The Core Strategic Management Group, governors and the local authority share grave reservations about the capacity of the current leadership of the school to rapidly and inexorably drive improvement and thereby achieve the removal of special measures.

School leaders do not analyse information they receive on students' progress forensically by subject and at the level of individual students. Furthermore, procedures to check on the reliability of such information are not robust. As a result, school leaders have an inaccurate view of how well students are doing: hence their acceptance of the wildly optimistic predictions for the 2015 GCSE examinations in English presented by the department.

Safeguarding is ineffective because staff and students do not follow the school's policies, for example with regard to fire drills. During this visit, the fire alarm was set off maliciously. Neither staff nor students followed the set guidance for such an eventuality and, as a result, hundreds of students ended up streaming through a very narrow exit, leading to a bottleneck that was potentially very dangerous.

The school development plan is not specific enough in spelling out the actions that need to be implemented if the school is to improve. Timescales are too vague and success criteria insufficiently measurable. In discussions held with inspectors during the visit, school leaders readily recounted actions they had taken to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection; however, rarely could they provide any incontrovertible evidence of impact.

External support

The school has received extensive guidance and some degree of challenge from both the local authority and the diocese. Invaluable support has been provided by the headteacher of Thornleigh Salesian College. Unfortunately, the senior leadership team has become over-reliant on such support and as a consequence has not developed the skills, confidence and resilience to drive improvement on their own.

Priorities for further improvement are as follows:

- Ensure all staff and students follow the school's policies in relation to safeguarding, particularly regarding evacuation procedures.
- Governors must urgently use all powers at their disposal to hold senior leaders and others across the school more effectively to account for driving rapid and sustained improvement.
- Ensure all systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work, particularly regarding the quality of teaching, are supported by demonstrable evidence of impact.

- Ensure all information provided by teachers on students' progress is reliable and based on a range of sound evidence.
- Improve the effectiveness, consistency and impact of marking.
- Undertake a 'root and branch' re-examination of the school's principal priorities for improvement and develop sharply focused plans with clear lines of accountability, timescales and measurable success criteria to propel the school forward.
- Improve behaviour and stamp out bullying by working more effectively with students so that they consider other people's feelings and have respect for both themselves and others.