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Mr John Toal
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Toal

Special measures monitoring inspection of De La Salle School

Following my visit with Derek Kitchin and Marcia Harding, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 22 and 23 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection but only in subject areas where leadership and management have the capacity for effective support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

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 lead 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 22 March–23 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of five teachers and five groups of pupils. They also met with two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors visited morning tutorials and an assembly. They observed lessons across the school in a range of subject areas and looked at the work of pupils. A significant number of the lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in December 2015, senior leaders and governors have formulated their future staffing structure in order to address a budget deficit. The new structure will come into force in September 2016 and a number of staff have opted to take voluntary redundancy. No new members of staff have taken up post since the last monitoring inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new headteacher continues to provide clear direction for the school and he is highly aspirational for the pupils at De La Salle. Senior leaders as a whole are becoming more confident in their roles and this was acknowledged by teachers who were spoken to during the inspection. Leaders are honest about the performance of their school and know that it is not yet where they want it to be.

Difficult decisions have had to be taken about the future staffing of the school in the face of the budget deficit. Senior leaders and governors have managed this well and have taken robust steps to ensure that the school's funding is managed effectively. As a result, an appropriate budget for the coming year has been set.

School leaders are now holding their colleagues to account more effectively for the performance of pupils. There are regular accountability meetings which are attended by senior leaders and governors. These meetings, coupled with the quality assurance mechanisms in place, are helping to support the senior leaders' drive of 'no excuses'.

Senior leaders' approaches to improving the quality of teaching are now more decisive. Leaders show a greater readiness to challenge and tackle underperformance and as a result, the quality of teaching is improving. Leaders have set out their expectations for the standards expected in teaching and pupils' progress and these expectations have been discussed with teaching staff and presented in a very clear manner. The document has been closely aligned with the national standards for teachers. As a result, there is much greater clarity around the expectations of teachers.

The effectiveness of middle leadership remains variable. This has been recognised by senior leaders and rapid support plans for a number of staff have been implemented. There is a need for some tightening of the wording of some of the plans to ensure that the impact of the actions can be effectively monitored.

Middle leaders spoken to during the inspection commented that they now feel that they are more challenged and held to account by their senior leadership colleagues. They recognise the importance of the role that they play in school improvement and value the support that they are receiving.

The school holds a significant amount of information about the performance of pupils. However, there is no clear evaluation of the performance of all groups of pupils across the school. The lack of evaluation means that leaders are not always clear enough about the overall performance trends in the school. Governors receive information about the performance of pupils in Key Stage 4 but it does not include all groups of pupils, and the information provided about the progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 lacks detail. Consequently, although challenging and supportive, governors do not have the full picture of progress for pupils in the school.

Similarly, there is no routine analysis of the exclusion information. This means that it is not possible to establish trends and any emerging patterns in rates of exclusion for groups of pupils over time or to be able to respond to these trends in a strategic way.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching has continued to improve overall. Inspectors saw evidence of strong practice in a number of areas of the school and senior leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching over time are now accurate.

Opportunities for teachers to share good practice are more frequent and there is a calendar of training for staff in place. Teachers have focused recently on developing their questioning skills in order to engage pupils and challenge their thinking more effectively. This work is having a positive impact in the classroom as pupils are now required to reflect more deeply on their work in a number of areas.

Some poor practice does, however, persist in school; leaders have this firmly in their view and are addressing areas where teaching does not yet meet expectations. They recognise that there is more to do. Inspectors noted that in some teaching, pupils are not given appropriately challenging work and as a result, progress is not strong. Some questioning does not yet challenge pupils sufficiently and there is some poor use of instructions, which means that pupils are unclear about what they have to do.

The use of the school's marking policy in general is improving and as a result, pupils are provided with better advice on how to improve their work. However, there continue to be a number of areas where high-quality feedback is not the norm. Pupils spoken to by inspectors commented that in some instances, their work is not

marked frequently enough and quoted examples of where their work had not been marked for a considerable amount of time. This is particularly the case where classes are taught by supply teachers.

Inspectors noted some effective use of homework but this is not consistently the case. This was a view that was expressed by some of the pupils who were spoken to. There remains a need for tighter monitoring of the homework set to ensure that this aspect of the school's work fully supports the development of pupils' good study habits.

Working relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support the needs of pupils with special educational needs or disability.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils at De La Salle are polite and smart. In general, they show positive attitudes towards their learning, although to a lesser extent where the quality of teaching is not as effective as it needs to be. Pupils work well together and independently.

Pupils spoken to by inspectors said that they feel safe in school and expressed the view that De La Salle is 'a family school'. They comment that instances of bullying are rare but that if they do occur, they are quickly resolved by teachers.

A new rewards policy has been very recently introduced and pupils overall welcome this. It is too early to establish the impact of this initiative and leaders are listening to the views of pupils and parents to ensure that any early concerns about the implementation of the policy are ironed out.

The attendance of pupils continues to be above the national average overall. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below that of other pupils and the gap is not narrowing.

The rate of exclusion has historically been below the national average; however, the rate has risen slightly during this current term. Leaders do not routinely analyse the exclusions, which means that trends and emerging patterns of behaviour cannot be robustly identified and addressed.

Pupils in Year 8 now select their option subjects to begin their GCSEs in Year 9. Pupils spoken to said that although they found it difficult to choose their options, the advice given by their teachers had provided them with an appropriate steer for the future. Pupils in Year 11 commented that the advice they had received was helpful in helping them to make choices about the next steps in their education.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress and attainment of pupils in the school are improving. Gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing, although there remains some variation between year groups and subject areas. The progress of disadvantaged learners remains a considerable focus for the school, and targets set for this group of pupils are very aspirational.

School data seen by inspectors indicate that the outcomes for pupils in the current Year 11 are likely to be stronger than previously. Progress indicators for the most-able pupils show improvement in English and mathematics, and the progress of middle-ability pupils is showing a significant improvement in these subject areas. Predictions for future performance are now more robust as the school has taken steps to moderate pupils' work in this key stage and some members of staff have been involved in additional training from examination boards to ensure that their assessments are accurate.

Extra help and additional classes are put in place to support pupils' progress in Key Stage 4 in preparation for their examinations. Leaders are aware that there is currently not enough focus placed on Key Stage 3 and the tracking of data and follow-up to assessment data are not yet rigorous enough in this key stage.

External support

The local authority continues to provide strong and effective support for the school. School improvement advisers know the school well and provide guidance that is enhancing senior leaders' confidence and ability to perform their roles well. In addition, the local authority has provided support for the leaders and governors of the school in helping them to find ways of addressing the budget deficit. School leaders continue to work with the local network of secondary schools which is enabling them to seek out and use best practice. Additional opportunities for the most-able learners are provided by Carmel College with enrichment courses taking place, for example in critical thinking.