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Mr James Burke OBE
St Anne's Roman Catholic High School, Stockport
Glenfield Road
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Dear Mr Burke

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

Following my visit with Victoria Atherton, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 22–23 June 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 22–23 June 2016

Evidence

During this monitoring visit, inspectors met with the interim headteacher, governors, other senior leaders, members of staff and pupils. In addition, we met with representatives of the Diocese of Salford and the local authority. Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils both in lessons and around the school site. We examined a wide range of documentation including information on pupils' progress and attendance; records relating to pupils' behaviour; reports to governors; reports from a consultant working with the school and documentation relating to safeguarding. Inspectors also scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work across several subjects and year groups. During the inspection, a fire drill was arranged. This was to establish the effectiveness of actions taken in response to my findings at a previous visit in October 2015, when arrangements for evacuation in the event of fire were judged inadequate.

Context

The governing body of the school, in conjunction with the Diocese of Salford, has continued the process of academisation discussed at my previous visit. The school is set to become an academy from Easter 2017. The interim headteacher has agreed to remain in post until then in order to ensure that the transition to academy status is as smooth as possible. The head of the English department is leaving at the end of this term and the current second-in-department is to take up this post from September. The diocese has provided substantial funding for an extensive building and refurbishment programme, to commence during the summer, in order to address deficiencies relating to the school site raised at previous monitoring visits.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The 'green shoots' of improvement, discernible at my previous visit, are now coming to fruition. Although there remain some obstacles to the removal of special measures, owing largely to a legacy of poor leadership in the past, the school is firmly on the road to recovery. The standard of education that pupils now receive has improved immeasurably.

The contribution of the dynamic and determined interim headteacher has been the single most important factor in securing improvement. He leads by example and has been unswerving in his drive to improve this school. His prior experience of leading schools in challenging circumstances has been hugely beneficial.

The interim headteacher has succeeded in uniting the school behind him. His personal contribution is recognised by all members of the school community. For example, during our visit, one pupil enthused, 'He's the best thing that's happened to St. Anne's.' This sentiment was echoed in correspondence from parents and comments from governors, staff and other pupils.

The interim headteacher has provided much-needed direction to a senior leadership team that had suffered from a lack of guidance in the past. As a result, the school is in a much better place to go forward. The monitoring of the quality of teaching is driven with rigour and this has led to noticeable improvements, for example in the effectiveness of marking.

School leaders now pay close attention to the achievement of different groups of pupils. The management of funds available through the pupil premium has been particularly effective. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the educational achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.) This area of the school's work has been led with a strong sense of moral purpose: there is a conviction, emanating from the governing body and pervading the school, that these pupils deserve to achieve as well as their peers. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making much better progress and in some instances are doing just as well as other pupils both in the school and nationally.

The governing body has grown in confidence and is much better informed than at the time of my first visit. As a result, governors are now far more capable of holding school leaders to account. The transition to academy status had faltered, at my previous visit, but is now moving apace. The diocese has been successful in securing sponsorship for the school to become an academy, through partnership with thriving schools nearby, and this is a promising development.

Weaknesses at middle leadership level have been tackled robustly. A far keener culture of accountability permeates the school. As a result, there is a shared sense of responsibility that has been the spur to improvement. Although senior leaders expressed regret at the imminent departure of the head of the English department, they are convinced that the future leadership of this subject is in capable hands and that improvements so far achieved will be sustained.

Performance management procedures have been improved and are clearly understood by teaching staff. There is currently no system in place to monitor the performance of non-teaching staff. As a result, some staff are not always as effective as they might be.

The practice of safeguarding is effective, but this is not always reflected in policies available on the school's website, which are well out of date. All staff and governors have received relevant training in safeguarding. The school works particularly well with pupils whose circumstances may have rendered them vulnerable. School leaders have raised pupils' awareness of the dangers they may face in wider society, such as extremism. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and they recognise that staff are now more vigilant about their safety, for example when moving around the site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching has improved immeasurably since my first visit. Pupils

spoken to during this visit endorse this point of view. There were always pockets of excellent teaching, for example in history and religious studies, but teaching of high quality is now more in evidence across a range of subjects.

The best teaching is characterised by high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This was witnessed in an English lesson, observed during the inspection. Year 8 pupils were discussing the psychological profile of the lead character in 'Macbeth' by William Shakespeare. The teacher's probing questions elicited perceptive responses from pupils, demonstrating a strong understanding of the text. Pupils' studious attitudes and engagement ensured that they made excellent progress.

Pupils are encouraged to write extensively in some subjects, such as history, religious studies and English: this supports the development of literacy skills. Numeracy skills are also being supported more effectively through better teaching in mathematics and across the curriculum, for example in science.

Procedures to improve the overall quality of teaching are efficient, but still not always as effective as they might be. This is because some senior leaders are not as rigorous as others in sticking to the policy that the school has developed. As a result, although the effectiveness of teaching in general has undoubtedly improved, there are still some small pockets of poor practice.

Pupils value teachers' guidance on how to improve their work and, in most instances, marking makes a strong contribution to increasing pupils' skills and knowledge. This was particularly marked in written work in physical education, seen during the inspection: the teacher's comments challenged the pupil to extend his answers in such a way that the ensuing work demonstrated considerable gains in learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Poor attendance remains the single most stubborn obstacle to the removal of special measures. Almost 10% of pupils are routinely absent from school. Rates of persistent absence are also far too high. It is incontrovertible that pupils who do not attend school will fail to reap the benefits of the improvements to many aspects of school life that have been so hard won.

School leaders have struggled to develop a successful strategy to tackle this problem and so far there is little evidence of impact. A very small minority of parents have not helped the school or their children by allowing them to be absent for sometimes spurious reasons.

Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the many extra-curricular clubs they can attend, such as in science and sport. They appreciate the fact that many teachers go out of their way to provide opportunities that enrich their lives, often despite very poor facilities and accommodation. Proposals to improve classrooms, and the site in general, are welcomed by pupils. It is undeniable that the current dreadful condition of some classrooms does not create a climate conducive to learning.

Pupils spoke very favourably about how they feel 'listened to' by the interim headteacher. They are particularly impressed by changes to catering arrangements that have led to a far more nutritious and appealing range of food on offer at lunchtime. They are happy that they can now select healthy options, such as fruit and vegetables, which are reasonably priced and wholesome. It was a pleasure to see them chatting sociably, demonstrating good manners and enjoying their lunches.

Pupils were adamant during this visit that incidents of bullying of any description have decreased exponentially since my first visit. Pupils spoken to during the visit stated that teachers now 'nip issues in the bud' and that school prefects are also helpful in overcoming bullying.

School leaders have been highly effective in promoting respect and tolerance for others. Initiatives to prevent racism have a high profile and have been influential. For example, pupils spoken to during the visit explained how their teachers have encouraged them to welcome pupils who have come to the school from other countries: as one pupil commented, 'We are all one school... we have to help each other.'

Pupils' behaviour in lessons has improved over time. However, on occasion, lessons are still disturbed by low-level disruption, particularly when the teaching is not as good as it might be. Pupils spoken to during this visit expressed irritation with their fellow pupils as they rightly feel that such disruption gets in the way of learning. On the other hand, pupils' behaviour during the fire drill was impeccable. Sensible and considerate, they displayed considerable maturity. This was the antithesis of the poor behaviour observed at my first visit and clearly indicates how far this school has travelled.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are going from strength to strength. Predictions for pupils in Year 11 who have taken GCSE examinations represent a considerable improvement on previous years. The school has made every attempt to ensure that these projections are accurate by liaising with other schools and representatives of examination boards.

Across other year groups, improvement is even more noticeable. Predictions for pupils in Year 10 who are yet to take examinations are very promising and represent further improvement. Assessment of these pupils' progress has been subject to the same rigorous scrutiny as mentioned above. Therefore, school leaders are confident that the current trajectory of improvement is sustainable.

Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved markedly since the previous inspection, when this was identified as an area for improvement. In some subjects, such as mathematics, any gaps between the achievement of this group of pupils and that of others are closing rapidly. Predictions for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils set to achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English

and mathematics, are very close to the national average for all pupils. Effective deployment of extra staffing, particularly in English and mathematics, has been extremely beneficial in securing improvement in this area of the school's work.

The very small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress relative to their individual starting points. Provision for such pupils is well led and they receive appropriate support.

There has been a strong drive by school leaders to raise awareness of the needs of most-able pupils in order to improve their rates of progress. Teachers are now better equipped to adopt teaching approaches that enable these pupils to succeed. As a result, according to information provided by the school during this visit, these pupils are overall on target to achieve well.

External support

Strong support, both financial and strategic, has been provided by both the diocese and the local authority. This support has been critical, challenging and well informed, providing additional vision and direction: it has been pivotal in steadying the school when it was on a downward trend and latterly has been instrumental in propelling the school forward.

The school has also benefited from advice and guidance provided by Thornleigh Salesian College and Cheadle Hulme High School. This has been particularly helpful in developing assessment and ensuring that it is accurate.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently address weaknesses in attendance so that all pupils can derive benefit from improvements that have been made and thereby achieve their potential.