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Mr John Toal
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Dear Mr Toal

Special measures monitoring inspection of De La Salle School

Following my visit with Philip Wall, Ofsted Inspector and Jan Peckett, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 28 and 29 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 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next inspection.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that 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.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a group of middle leaders, members of the governing body, representatives from the local authority and a representative from Liverpool Catholic Archdiocese. Inspectors listened to the opinions of a wide range of pupils both formally and at social times. Inspectors also took account of complaints to Ofsted.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, a number of staff have resigned their posts and will leave in the summer. There have been a number of days on which the school has not been open to key stages 3 and 4 pupils due to industrial action. The headteacher has been in post for less than a year. The school has received an academy order from the Department for Education.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The quality of teaching is not improving quickly enough because the leadership and management of teaching and learning are not strong enough. Many departments work in isolation and not enough good practice is shared. When weaknesses are identified in their practice, teachers are not provided with high-quality support to improve.

The headteacher cares deeply about achieving the best outcomes for all pupils, but there is insufficient experience, support and expertise within the senior leadership team to rapidly raise standards. As a result, many priorities and initiatives have been put in place to try to improve outcomes, but there is little impact.

Governors are asking all the right questions. They regularly question and challenge senior leaders about all aspects of school life, but they are often given a more favourable view of standards than is actually the case. This is not helping the school to build capacity to improve. Self-evaluation is far too generous and lacks a searching and honest 'position statement' of current standards rather than an aspirational commentary on how the school would like to be.

The school's plan to offer more English and mathematics in the curriculum next year at the expense of some physical education lessons is a concern. Pupils reported, and inspectors observed, some very weak provision in both English and mathematics. However, provision in physical education is strong, standards are high and pupils are engaged in their learning.

The quality of the curriculum offered in the internal exclusion centre does not meet the needs of all the pupils who spend time there. Pupils who have been taken out of lessons may find themselves having to complete work that they cannot read.

The single central record of checks made on adults working in the school meets requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils were observed making very strong progress in some lessons due to challenging and engaging teaching. This good progress, however, is undermined by teaching that is poorly planned and dull. Some of the most able pupils misbehave in lessons because they are bored. Some of the least able pupils become disengaged from learning because they have insufficient support to help them read and write properly. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson, pupils persistently talked over the teacher and distracted each other because their learning was too easy. Expectations were not high enough. In a Year 9 English lesson, pupils were removed from the class due to poor behaviour, but it was evident that the work was too difficult and did not interest them.

By contrast, in a Year 10 geography lesson, pupils were completely engaged with their learning and, as a result, were accurately analysing data from their recent field trip to Grasmere. The classroom atmosphere was one of excitement and fun as the teacher used his excellent relationships with the pupils and good humour to bring out the best in everyone. Similarly, in a Year 9 food technology mixed-ability group, everyone managed to make pancakes. Pupils worked industriously and independently with no hint of disengagement, due to the teacher's very thorough preparation and the very strong mutual respect. Pupils were rightly proud of their work; everyone achieved regardless of their prior attainment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The vast majority of pupils behave well in school. Typically, pupils are polite, hold the door open for adults and behave with respect to each other and their teachers. Senior leaders are now analysing information about pupils removed from lessons and those excluded from school in much more detail, but this exercise is futile because some staff continue to ignore poor behaviour in lessons. Recorded incidents of misbehaviour do not give a true reflection of standards because some staff fail to recognise or apply sanctions to pupils who behave badly in lessons and at social times. Pupils rightly feel that sanctions are applied inconsistently; this leads to a feeling of inequality.

The leadership of behaviour is not strong enough. There is insufficient support for staff to deal with some very challenging classes that have become used to misbehaving. Although the system for teachers to call senior leaders to support them has been strengthened, it is reactive and often too late, because learning has already been disrupted. There is a missed opportunity to identify those lessons

in which teachers need support to succeed; consequently, a cycle of poor behaviour and disrupted learning has continued. Teachers do not always insist on appropriate behaviour. For example, not all teachers ensure that before pupils enter the classroom their bags are removed and purposeful learning starts.

There is not enough effective supervision at lunchtime and no effective plan to deploy staff during wet weather. As a result, areas of the school have very little staff supervision so pupils get away with behaving in a way that does not meet expectations.

Overall attendance is above the national average, but there is a big gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and their peers and it is not closing. The school does not insist on pupils' punctuality to school and there is a lack of urgency to arrive at lessons on time.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils enter the school with abilities well above those found nationally. Pupils who are in the lowest sets are not 'less able' compared with all pupils nationally; the majority of them are of average ability. However, some teachers have a less favourable perception of pupils' abilities and consequently do not expect enough of them. Too many pupils make little or no progress in lessons because what they are learning is boring or too easy.

Predictions for the current Year 11 pupils are high with well over one third of pupils expected to make very strong progress in English and mathematics from their starting points. Yet these predictions are at odds with the quality of teaching observed by inspectors.

Gaps in the achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are predicted to close, but inspectors found that often teaching for this group was not good enough. The tracking system for key stage 3 pupils has little meaning to teachers or pupils. Scrutiny of pupils' books shows that assessment grades are over-generous and do not help pupils know how well they are doing or what they need to do next.

External support

The local authority and Liverpool Archdiocese have provided some effective support to help senior leaders check the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work at key stage 4. Support has also been provided to senior leaders to narrow the gaps in achievement and attendance for disadvantaged pupils, and, while systems are now in place, there is no impact. No support has been provided to directly monitor the quality of teaching since the previous inspection.