

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Dr James Kilmartin
Cardinal Newman Catholic School
The Upper Drive
Hove
East Sussex
BN3 6ND

Dear Dr Kilmartin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cardinal Newman Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen school improvement plans by adding measurable milestones which governors can use to evaluate the impact of actions taken by school leaders
- evaluate improvements to teaching, learning and assessment through their impact on pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied

me on a brief visit to a number of lessons around the school. I evaluated a range of documents, including improvement plans.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in December 2015, you have restructured leadership roles and responsibilities in the senior team and created a new leadership post to focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Staff have also been appointed to new non-teaching roles, including an anti-bullying coordinator, an additional pastoral manager to support the most vulnerable pupils and an attendance officer for the sixth form.

There have been several changes to the membership of the governing body, including the appointment of a new chair and vice-chair.

Main findings

Although you were disappointed by the previous inspection findings, you had already identified that teaching and learning needed to be more consistent and that disadvantaged pupils were not making enough progress to catch up with their peers. You and your senior leadership team used the inspection outcome as an opportunity to increase the range and pace of improvement at the school.

Shortly after the inspection, school leaders and governors set out to systematically and urgently address the identified areas for improvement. You quickly reorganised leadership responsibilities, and the senior leaders I met had a clear understanding of the part they had to play in driving change. Leaders sensibly decided to build on work already started to provide clarity about expectations across the school. Two documents for staff, called 'Cardinal 10' and 'Newman Expects', explain what teaching and learning should look like at the school. The 'Newman Expects' document contains a new presentation policy designed to improve the presentation of pupils' work. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning is checking carefully that these new expectations are being implemented by teachers consistently. Processes for gathering information about the quality of teaching and learning have been strengthened and middle leaders are increasingly taking responsibility for this monitoring role.

Staff have seized the opportunities for training and professional development offered since the inspection. Turnover of staff brought 30 new teachers with fresh ideas. Twenty-six existing and aspiring senior and middle leaders are participating in nationally accredited leadership training courses which include small research projects. The leaders I met during my tour described the strategies they were trying out to improve learning with enthusiasm. Leaders, governors and representatives from the local authority describe a change to a more open and innovative culture at the school.

Changes to governance also took place swiftly following the inspection. Governor committees were streamlined and working parties set up to scrutinise school improvement priorities by working more closely with school leaders. An external review of governance was commissioned and most of its recommendations have been enacted. A new, experienced chair of governors was elected in September, supported by a new vice-chair. A number of governors stood down and have been replaced with new governors who bring helpful skills and expertise. Relevant training has taken place. Governors are now better informed and have the confidence to challenge school leaders more robustly, although there is scope to hold school leaders to account even more rigorously. It would help if school improvement plans had measurable milestones which governors could use to evaluate the impact of actions taken by school leaders during the school year.

The school improvement plan is focused on addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Your priority was to improve the quality of teaching. In addition to reinforcing expectations for behaviour and participation during lessons, you introduced a new feedback policy to help pupils improve their work. Your more thorough systems for monitoring teaching and learning show that teachers and pupils are carrying out the marking and response tasks you expect consistently. During my visits to classrooms the atmosphere was purposeful and pupils were appropriately involved in a range of activities. It was clear that the pupils knew what was expected of them during the lessons. Leaders now need to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve teaching on the rate of pupils' progress.

Leaders and governors have shown determination to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. An external review of the use of pupil premium funding led to an overhaul of your processes so that the considerable expenditure can now be tracked. You have detailed records of interventions and other activities taking place to support disadvantaged pupils. The school's pupil performance information, thoroughly analysed by your assistant head with responsibility for assessment, shows promising signs of impact, particularly in Years 7 and 8. The newly appointed assistant head with oversight of disadvantaged pupils is sensibly evaluating the impact of different approaches taken. This emerging information should be used to improve the quality of the school's current pupil premium reports, which do not evaluate the impact of previous expenditure on eligible and other pupils fully or describe your strategy for this year's use of the pupil premium with information which meets the government's requirements.

Your rapid response to the inspection had a positive impact on the 2016 outcomes for Year 11 pupils. Progress measures showed that, overall, pupils made strong progress compared with national levels. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved at least a GCSE grade C in both English and mathematics rose by 20%. Progress made by disadvantaged pupils was not as high as other pupils, but the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and other pupils with the same starting points are diminishing. Your more robust progress-tracking systems are

checking this improvement continues, as well as identifying other groups of pupils who are falling behind and where intervention and extra support is required.

Disadvantaged and other pupils have benefited from the whole-school drive to improve literacy. Among several changes to the way reading and writing is taught, all pupils in Years 7 and 8 participate in a structured reading programme. This has helped improve reading ages, particularly for the pupils who started well below their chronological age.

In your leadership restructure, you created a post for oversight of the most able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Work is under way to ensure that aspirations for this group are high enough. You have a wide range of criteria for identification of the most able and talented pupils, and plan to look closely for disadvantaged pupils with potential who may not yet be high attainers.

As headteacher, you are committed to reducing the level of exclusions. You have recently created a small teaching provision in school for about 20 pupils who are most vulnerable to exclusion, poor attendance and underachievement. Many of these pupils experience a range of difficulties, and you have increased the level of pastoral and academic support available for them. The school works closely with a range of other agencies, including commissioning support for pupils' mental health and well-being.

School leaders have introduced a range of steps to improve attendance. Overall attendance at the school is rising, but the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains stubbornly low and this needs to be tackled effectively.

School leaders have taken effective action to improve safeguarding at the school. Site security has improved and procedures have been tightened. Year 11 pupils no longer leave the premises during the school day. You appointed a new anti-bullying coordinator to respond to any concerns and communicate more effectively with parents, and pupils have also trained to be anti-bullying ambassadors. School leaders should now seek feedback from pupils and families to find out how successful these steps have been.

Leaders and governors believe the school has made great progress since the previous inspection. They seek external verification from the local authority. They also participate in a national 'challenge partners' scheme in which school leaders from elsewhere visit the school to evaluate teaching and learning. Governors also invited the external reviewer of governance to return for a review of their progress. Feedback from all of these parties supports the school's view that it is moving in the right direction.

Next steps for school leaders are to conduct robust self-evaluation to determine which actions are making the greatest difference, identify your own priorities for improvement and make longer-term plans with suitably aspirational targets and

measurable milestones.

External support

The school benefits from effective support and challenge by Brighton and Hove local authority. The headteacher has regular useful meetings with a school improvement partner, and school leaders are held to account at termly strategy board meetings. The local authority has also supported governor training and development.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector