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8 January 2016

Mr Aidan Bannon
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bannon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Holy Trinity Catholic Media Arts College

Following my visit with Nigel Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 15–16 December, 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 given during the inspection and for the time that was 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 November 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. Her Majesty's Inspector must be consulted prior to any such appointments being made.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate students' progress, by:
 - ensuring leaders accurately evaluate the quality of teaching informed by the rates of students' progress
 - making more effective use of accurate and well-timed assessment to inform teachers' expectations of what students can achieve so that aspirational targets are set
 - ensuring that teachers plan and set work that is always well matched to what students already know and understand
 - sharing good practice in questioning more effectively so that all teachers challenge students to develop their ideas and responses more carefully
 - improving the application of the school's marking policy so that students always know what they have done well and what they need to do next to improve further.
- Improve achievement significantly, especially at Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics, so that all students and groups of students make at least the progress they should, by ensuring that:
 - progress is monitored carefully from Year 7 onwards so that underperformance is identified rapidly and actions are well targeted to address gaps in students' knowledge and understanding
 - the most able students are provided with appropriate opportunities to reach their full potential and that their progress is monitored regularly, so that more of these students achieve the highest grades.
- Take rapid action to improve the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - communication in the school is improved as a matter of urgency so that staff at all levels are able to confidently play their part in securing the required improvements
 - roles and responsibilities are well matched to the strengths and abilities of senior leaders
 - effective systems are in place to enable accurate monitoring of progress for all students and groups of students, including the most able, and that actions taken are accurately evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis
 - the way in which the pupil premium funding is used is evaluated so that it has a greater and more sustained impact on closing the gaps between these students and others in the school
 - subject leaders are supported to understand and carry out their responsibility to monitor the progress of all students and groups of students from Year 7 onwards and to take appropriate steps where underperformance is identified

- the governing body improves their understanding of information about students' achievement so that they are more rigorous in holding school leaders to account for the quality of teaching and achievement.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15–16 December 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors were unable to meet with the headteacher. Inspectors met with members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. Meetings were also held with members of the interim executive board, the headteacher of Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy and a representative from the Birmingham Education Partnership, who are providing support for the school. In addition, the lead inspector met with the deputy director of the diocese school leadership and school improvement division. Inspectors spoke to pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes and in classrooms, and met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised school documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching, and records of pupils' progress and attainment. Inspectors also took into account findings from the Ofsted staff questionnaire that was distributed to staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a number of contextual changes have taken place. The previous governing body was dissolved in July 2015 and an interim executive board now performs governance duties. Sixteen members of staff left the school at the end of the summer term. Fourteen new members of staff took up post at the beginning of the current academic year. These appointments included new subject leaders in mathematics, technology and modern foreign languages.

From January, there will be temporary teachers in humanities and mathematics. There are further temporary teachers in English and information technology. One teacher has submitted their resignation and is due to leave at the end of the spring term.

The arrangements through which local authority support is delivered to the school have changed. This support is now offered by the Birmingham Education Partnership, a school improvement organisation, commissioned to deliver support and improvement services to schools by Birmingham City Council.

During the inspection the headteacher was absent from school. He has been absent from school since before the October half-term. During this period of absence, the headteacher's duties have been shared between two deputy headteachers.

Outcomes for pupils

The provisional examination results of pupils leaving the school in 2015 fell short of expectations in a number of areas. Improvements were uneven at best, and some

aspects declined in relation to the previous year and in relation to the performance of other schools nationally.

The progress pupils made in mathematics by the time they left the school was too low. Not enough pupils made the progress they should have done. This was particularly the case for middle-ability pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and disadvantaged pupils. Across the range of other subjects, outcomes were variable, with attainment particularly poor in drama, geography, art, sociology, health and social care and product design. Few pupils secured the highest grades. This is because teaching is not good enough to challenge pupils to excel.

However, among last year's performance, there were some signs of improvement. Pupils made better progress in English than they have done in the past, although the progress made by the most-able pupils was weaker than it should have been. Pupils achieved well in Spanish, photography, media studies, film studies and in science.

The outcomes of disadvantaged pupils are of considerable concern. Gaps in overall attainment measures between disadvantaged pupils, their classmates and other pupils nationally are too wide and not closing. Indeed, in some respects, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils shows a declining trend over time. In English, gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates, particularly middle- and higher-ability pupils, have widened because their progress is improving at a slower rate than that of their peers. In mathematics, disadvantaged pupils make inadequate progress and the achievement gaps between these pupils, their classmates and other pupils nationally have widened.

The school's predictions of GCSE outcomes in 2015 were inaccurate across a wide range of subjects. In some areas, such as mathematics, leaders' investigations have revealed the reasons for this. Furthermore, Key Stage 3 performance information currently held contains too many anomalies and discrepancies to be considered reliable. In some subjects, inspectors found inconsistencies between the school's records and the quality of pupils' work in their books. School leaders recognise the critical need to strengthen the robustness of assessment information through rigorous external moderation, in order that they gain a precise understanding of pupils' progress and attainment across subjects, and across all year groups. Until this is done, this substantially limits leaders' abilities to bring about improvements.

Scrutiny of pupils' learning and work in lessons reveals that pupils are beginning to make better progress in some areas. For example, in mathematics, teachers are increasingly focused on ensuring that key mathematical concepts are secured and mastered. In English, pupils develop their reading and writing skills well. Across other subjects, however, there continues to be too much variability. Because teaching does not yet take into consideration pupils' abilities and needs well enough, the progress made by key groups of pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged

pupils, and disabled pupils or those who have special education needs, is uneven, at times perfunctory.

A small cohort of lower-ability pupils in Year 7 are benefiting from work planned specifically for them. This is helping them to focus on the acquisition of their basic skills, and many are making progress from their low starting points. However, a lack of systematic deployment of Year 7 catch-up funding means that the school's work has not extended to all of those pupils who need additional help and support. Given the low skills of pupils on entry to the school, this is most worrying.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils behave well in lessons and conduct themselves in a sensible, orderly manner around the school when moving between lessons and during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors found pupils to be polite, courteous and respectful. When inspectors talked to pupils, many expressed pride in their school. Pupils acknowledge that the school community is diverse, but say that pupils of different faiths and backgrounds get on well because the school is a friendly, supportive place in which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated. A Year 10 assembly provided leaders with a good opportunity to praise, reward and celebrate pupils' achievements. The positive atmosphere was reflected in the way pupils actively applauded the success of others; furthermore, leaders used this as a springboard to encourage the achievement of all pupils.

The vast majority of pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning. Pupils get on with their work, try hard and want to do well. In some lessons where the work set for pupils does not capture their interests, a minority of pupils can lose interest, become distracted and engage in low-level disruption.

Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and that they can talk to their teachers if they have a problem or concern. A number of pupils spoken to did not like the toilets, though said that this was not because they felt unsafe. Pupils have a good understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and of the range of risks they may face, including the dangers of using social media, extremism, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. This awareness is raised by leaders in a suitably sensitive manner through assemblies and workshops, and during 'super learning' days. However, leaders recognise that more could be done to foster systematically the progression of pupils' personal development and well-being over their time at the school.

Leaders have established a culture in which staff give pupils' well-being and safety the highest priority. This is enabled through a comprehensive programme of training that ensures that all teachers and support staff are highly vigilant to the signs of risks and dangers pupils may face. The designated safeguarding lead regularly updates staff so that they are kept well informed about any emerging national and

local issues that may have implications for the well-being of the school community. Reporting and referral procedures are very effective and supported by close work with a range of local agencies to keep pupils free from harm. Leaders have actively commissioned an external audit of the safety of the school site from the local authority. They have responded quickly to the findings of this, and, for example, revised some aspects of their procedures for checking in visitors.

Whole-school attendance is below average, partly because absence rates have been affected by the time some pupils took off for religious observance. The overall attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving when compared to the same period of time last academic year. However, too many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are still regularly absent from school. The school is working more actively with families, particularly those of pupils identified as vulnerable, to improve pupils' attendance, and undertake regular home visits to bring about improvements. Punctuality has improved and few pupils are now regularly late for school. Fixed-term exclusions are reducing because the school is working better to support the needs of those pupils who present particularly challenging behaviour.

Increasingly well-focused careers education and independent advice and guidance significantly reduced the number of pupils who did not enter education, employment or training last academic year, including disadvantaged pupils. However, the poor academic performance of this group of pupils means that some are still not well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Across the school, the quality of teaching continues to be inconsistent, but is improving. New staffing appointments in areas such as mathematics and technology have strengthened teaching and are beginning to help quicken pupils' progress in these subjects. As a result, many pupils are learning better than they have done in the past.

The shared approaches to pedagogy introduced by leaders are adopted consistently by teachers. In many respects, these are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Routine time given in lessons for pupils to reflect on, discuss and review their teachers' marking and feedback is supporting the progress of many pupils. For example, in an English lesson, the teacher carefully explained the writing process to pupils and supported them through it. The teacher gave pupils regular feedback and made time for them to reflect upon and refine their descriptive writing and this enabled them to make effective improvements.

Where learning is at its best, teachers plan well-structured lessons and use a variety of techniques to check regularly that the pupils they teach are learning well. In mathematics lessons, teachers ask carefully targeted and probing questions, and make good use of mini-whiteboards, to check pupils' understanding. This enables

teachers to draw out and challenge misconceptions so that they can ensure that key concepts are mastered before moving on. In this subject in particular, pupils also say that homework helps them to consolidate and extend their learning outside of lessons. This is not, however, the case in all subjects.

Teachers are increasingly aware that pupils have different needs and abilities in their classes. They share different expectations of what pupils should achieve through 'success criteria' that offer varying degrees of challenge. However, this approach is often too generic. Many teachers continue to lack the skills to use the information they gather successfully from their assessments to adapt their teaching sharply enough to plan lessons where pupils of different abilities in their class all learn effectively. This results in variations in the learning and progress of those pupils with disabilities or those with special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Sometimes teachers do not systematically check how well pupils are learning. As a consequence, pupils are moved on to new tasks without having secured their understanding, knowledge or skills. In some lessons, a lack of pace and urgency means that pupils work through activities too slowly or are given tasks that are not demanding enough of their abilities. As a result, they do not make the progress they should.

Pupils' low literacy skills prevent them from accessing tasks and achieving well across all areas of the curriculum. However, teachers across subjects are increasingly focused on developing the literacy skills of pupils. Some aspects of shared practice are emerging, but are not yet secure enough to make a sustained difference. In science, for example, lower-ability pupils struggled to respond to questions that required more extended written answers in their assessments. Insufficient work has taken place to promote pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher's absence has not hindered the progress of the school in its journey towards the removal of special measures. Leaders have continued to make progress against many of the areas for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection. The two deputy headteachers, supported effectively by the interim executive board, Birmingham Education Partnership and the commissioned headteacher, have worked well together to ensure that the school continues to maintain its focus on improving. Furthermore, they have ensured that the workforce are more galvanised in their efforts by improving the clarity of communication between senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. A culture of greater openness and transparency is emerging. Consequently, the views of staff, as shown in their response to Ofsted's questionnaire returns, are far more positive than they have been in the past.

The school's self-evaluation is more accurate. This provides a detailed and well-balanced account of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. Leaders are now increasingly able to identify, and therefore tackle, areas of weakness. As a result, they are beginning to develop greater capacity to improve. Leaders recognise that currently their plans for improvement do not set out sharply enough how successful outcomes will be measured. As a result, they are not as clear about the effectiveness of their work on the outcomes for different groups of pupils as they could be.

Arrangements for checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress across the school are more systematic and are now built into the routines of middle leaders. These processes are slowly developing the skills and abilities of middle leaders. New appointments to the middle leadership team within the mathematics, modern foreign languages and technology department are demonstrating early signs of strengthening this aspect of leadership and management. However, the variations in pupils' outcomes across subjects point to clear weaknesses in some areas of middle leadership. The current lack of robust assessment information across all year groups undermines the value of some of these monitoring systems.

Additional funding to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who start the school with lower-than-average attainment on entry has been inadequately deployed. This is evident in the lack of impact. Leaders are acutely aware of this. Much time has been spent disentangling how pupil premium funding has been allocated. Leaders now have a clear understanding of this and have put plans in place to better deploy this funding and make those staff whose roles are funded through these monies more accountable – this has come too late this year to inform performance management targets. Likewise, Year 7 catch-up funding has been used ineffectively and no robust plans are yet in place to address this. Leaders recognise that this is a deficiency in their provision. Leadership of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is at an early stage; systems are underdeveloped and impact has yet to be demonstrated. As a result, the school is not yet strongly enough positioned to raise the achievement of all groups of pupils.

The interim executive board is composed of a small group of experienced professionals from the education sector, public sector and diocese. They possess both a clear understanding of the role of governance and the skills to hold leaders to account. This group has quickly got to grips with the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Members of the board have unearthed a number of past systemic failures that have been quickly and robustly tackled, and set out clear protocols to ensure transparency in the school's operation. A wide-ranging review of policies and staff job descriptions has been undertaken to support this. Effective relationships have been forged between the interim executive board, school leaders, the Birmingham Education Partnership, the commissioned support school and the diocese. The interim executive board systematically monitors the work of the school, and asks searching questions that challenge leaders to ensure that they are provided with

clear, robust and accurate information and to make certain that leaders are bringing about improvements. This high level of challenge and support is a stark and positive contrast to the previous governance arrangements.

External support

The commissioned headteacher has provided invaluable continuity of support for school leaders, particularly in the absence of the headteacher, who have drawn considerably from her expertise.

The shift of monitoring and support arrangements from the local authority's 'monitoring task force' to the Birmingham Education Partnership has been smooth and efficient. Through 'round-table' meetings, a key additional layer of monitoring, challenge and support is provided to school leaders to promote school improvement further. These meetings benefit from the attendance of key representatives from the diocese and interim executive board, ensuring clarity of communication, and shared involvement in the strategic improvement of the school. The work undertaken by the Birmingham Education Partnership has included a three-day review of the quality of teaching in the school. This has provided an informative external check of the school's progress, with clear and accurate identification of the strengths of teaching and areas for improvement. It has also offered further testament to improvements in the quality of teaching over time.

External partners recognise the need to provide further support to school leaders in securing the accuracy of assessment information and in the effective deployment of additional funding.