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Mrs Ruth Holden  
Executive Headteacher  
Thomas More Catholic School  
Russell Hill Road  
Purley  
Surrey  
CR8 2XP

Dear Mrs Holden

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas More Catholic School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in December 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Alongside senior leaders and governors, you are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers use new assessment procedures consistently well to support all groups of pupils' progress, particularly disadvantaged pupils
- further improve attendance by improving that of the few very weak attendees, particularly in Year 10
- promptly finalise governors' roles and responsibilities so that secure lines of accountability are established that sustain improvements in the school.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the head of school, middle leaders and pupils. Meetings were also held with a representative from the local authority's school improvement service and one from the diocese of Southwark in order to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Your plans for improvement were evaluated. I visited lessons with you and the head of school to observe learning, scrutinise pupils' work and discuss pupils' learning with them. I scrutinised documentation including: policy documents regarding teaching, learning and assessment; a recent external review by the local authority's school improvement service and the diocese; attendance information; assessment information and the single central record of checks made on staff.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, the previous headteacher has retired. The chair of governors is retiring from his position as of the end of August 2017. Currently, governors are determining who will take on the role. You have been in post since May 2017 but have supported the head of school, formerly a deputy headteacher at this school who took up the temporary role, from April 2017. You have appointed two new deputy headteachers, two new assistant headteachers and two associate assistant headteachers from September 2017. Eighteen other staffing appointments have been made for September, including the head of English, the special educational needs coordinator and clerk to the governors. The school's website is currently being redeveloped and is due to be relaunched by September 2017.

## **Main findings**

Since the inspection in December 2016, there have been significant changes made to the structure and personnel of the school's teaching and leadership staff. Leaders recognise that initial changes took too much time. However, recent improvements have been significant because new senior leaders have a precise and accurate view of the school's performance. They have forced a change in approach that had not occurred prior to the last inspection, including placing pupils' performance, alongside their welfare, at the centre of the new strategies. Robust scrutiny of the school's work and learning from strengths in the leadership of the sixth form have been crucial in forming leaders' plans for development.

You have brought clarity to the school's improvement plans and have been instrumental in the implementation of a new senior leadership team structure. Changes are sustainable because of new school systems, robust lines of accountability and the scope for leaders to champion their areas of responsibility. Pupils and staff consistently reported to me that recent developments are felt positively across the school. They pointed to your work and that of the head of school as key reasons for the improvements, particularly in setting higher expectations for pupils' progress and behaviour. There is a feeling of optimism

among staff and pupils because of recent changes in leadership. Staff spoken to indicate that the enthusiasm has never changed but now more effective leadership means that their work is effective and directed at the right issues.

Middle leaders told the inspector about a shift in culture that now means that their identification of trends and issues is precise and leads to timely interventions. Teachers' professional development is having greater effect on pupils' progress because teachers have the time to reflect on their work and develop new skills. This includes using new assessment strategies more effectively, including using information to plan lessons that meet pupils' needs. Middle leaders draw upon external moderation when appropriate to prepare appropriate plans for learning that meet the demands of the new GCSE curriculum. I observed teachers using the new approaches well in history, English and mathematics lessons. Pupils also told me about how assessment has helped them to make better progress. However, leaders are right to identify that the recently introduced assessment and teaching strategies are yet to embed fully across the school. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is not improving as quickly as their peers' across the curriculum because further work remains to ensure that teachers respond to their needs precisely.

Leaders have wasted no time since April in making changes to school-wide systems and processes so that staff have greater access to useful information. Middle leaders feel enabled to close monitor pupils' progress because they are supported well in their work. Recently the necessary changes to the governing body have begun. This means that appropriately skilled governors can hold leaders more stringently to account for the performance of all groups of pupils and the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium. Senior leaders now expect greater scrutiny and challenge of their work than was the case before Easter. Governors recognise the need to step up to and meet this expectation even more effectively.

Pupils' attendance overall continues to be good. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 attend school regularly but the attendance of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is weaker. Effective strategies, for example greater engagement with families of persistently absent pupils and work with external agencies, are improving the overall picture. The attendance team works closely with pastoral leaders so that they consider pupils' needs and relevant contextual information to establish effective support strategies. However, the attendance of some harder to reach pupils, particularly those with highly complex needs, remains low in Years 10 and 11. School staff are tireless in their work to improve those pupils' attendance and recognise the significance of their work in securing pupils' performance and well-being. Leaders are aiming to establish a strong culture of attendance from Year 7 so that pupils know what to expect from day one.

### **External support**

The school is receiving close support from the diocese while changes to the governing body finalise. Since the last inspection, the diocese has provided scrutiny

of leaders' work alongside regular local authority reviews. The diocese arranged for your appointment and the appointment of the head of school in response to the identified need for stronger leadership. It has fully supported the recent appointment of other new senior leadership roles. A partnership with another school within the diocese is working well to develop sustainable teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin

**Her Majesty's Inspector**