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Mr David Hubbard
Corpus Christi Catholic High School
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Dear Mr Hubbard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Corpus Christi Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 19 December 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 November 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 November 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

The school should take further action to:

- continue to improve teaching so that variations in the quality of teaching and learning are further reduced
- improve the progress made by most-able pupils across the school
- improve pupils' progress and achievement in science
- improve the numeracy skills of pupils, particularly those who begin school

needing to catch up.

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspector held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils and the chair of the governing body. During these meetings, I discussed the actions taken since the previous inspection and their impact. Telephone calls were held with a representative of the local authority and the Diocese of Lancaster to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Learning walks were undertaken with a senior leader. Pupils were observed during social time. The school improvement plan and a range of documentation relating to school improvement were considered. Documents relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised. The quality of pupils' work in books was checked during the learning walk and also through a more formal work scrutiny.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes. Leaders have appointed a new member of the senior leadership team to strengthen teaching and learning throughout the school. Five members of staff have started at the school, including three new middle leaders. A number of staff have left the school. A new chair of governors is in place from October 2017. Reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding have been undertaken.

You have also improved the facilities and learning environment by building a new drama studio, refurbishing two science laboratories and creating a new garden for pupils to use.

Main findings

Leaders and governors are unrelenting in their drive to improve the experiences for all pupils. They are determined to ensure that all pupils benefit from a good quality of education which prepares them well for the future. Leaders and governors are acutely aware of the key actions which still require improvement. Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have reviewed the school's approach to assessment and improved behaviour across the school. Leaders have notably ensured that thorough quality assurance procedures are in place across all subjects and key stages to hold leaders and teachers to account for the quality of learning and pupils' progress. Despite the considerable improvements made in many areas of school life, leaders and governors are aware that they need some time now for the new systems and procedures to embed and make a positive difference to pupils' outcomes.

Leaders and governors recognise that the school is on a steady journey of improvement. They are adamant that any improvements should be sustainable and

continue to show impact on pupils' outcomes and experiences. These strategies have not had sufficient time to make a marked difference in pupils' outcomes. Provisional GCSE results for 2017 were still considerably below the national averages for progress and achievement. That said, attainment has improved. The proportion of pupils who achieved a good pass in English and mathematics rose by 3 percentage points to 46%. Progress has also improved considerably for most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, compared to the previous year. Some subject areas, such as religious education, English literature and particularly geography, show considerable improvements in outcomes for pupils. As a result, these outcomes have boosted confidence and expectations of staff and pupils as they demonstrate what pupils at Corpus Christi are capable of.

Leaders and governors are aware of the challenges ahead. Current information presented by leaders shows that current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve better again this year in the majority of subject areas. Younger pupils, particularly in key stage 3, however, make much stronger progress across their subjects. This is because all pupils now have been in the school since the headteacher was appointed following the school being placed in a category of concern in April 2013. These pupils have benefited from his strong and moral leadership which is a cornerstone of the school's Catholic ethos and values.

Leaders and governors have produced thorough plans to improve the school further. They have acknowledged and acted upon the issues identified in the previous inspection report. Leaders have faced the challenges in improving assessment, outcomes and behaviour and addressed them head-on. The school improvement plan supports leaders in their actions as it is clear and appropriate.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken further actions to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders regularly quality assure the 'typicality' of teaching, discussing their findings with senior leaders, middle leaders and individual teachers. As a result of this, leaders have an in-depth knowledge of the strengths in practice and swiftly put plans in place to address any weaknesses or variability in teaching and learning. Bespoke support from support plans to individualised training on areas such as improving questioning continues to improve teaching. All staff share this commitment to improve teaching and learning. They reflect on their practice and work closely in small groups and often drop in to other classes to share good practice and support each other's development. As a result of this focus, variability in the quality of teaching across the school is continuing to reduce.

Middle leaders benefit from developing links with other schools across the local area, again allowing good practice to be shared and increase opportunities for moderation and accuracy of assessments. Senior and middle leaders have taken effective action to improve the quality of feedback that pupils receive. There is still some variability in this area, but pupils and staff now know how well pupils are progressing in their learning.

Other ways that leaders have ensured that the progress of current pupils continues to improve is by undertaking a review of what is taught across the curriculum. As a result, the demands of the new GCSE courses have been extended into key stage 3 and significant transition work takes place to ensure that teachers build on the skills and knowledge pupils enter Year 7 with from primary school. Leaders have also changed how pupils are grouped in Year 7. Staff believe this is having a positive effect on progress and attainment. As a result of many successful actions, expectations for current pupils are high and latest assessment information shows a positive picture emerging for the majority of pupils. Progress in science and of the most able pupils across the school remain priorities for leaders.

Improvements in assessment practice are evident through a new and more frequent way of assessing pupils' progress and attainment across key stage 3. The new system allows leaders and teachers to quickly identify any pupils who are at risk of underachieving and put strategies in place to address this. Leaders set aspirational targets for pupils which pupils feel are attainable but challenging. Governors now receive clear and accurate information about the progress pupils are making. This helps them hold leaders firmly to account for progress across every subject and every year group.

There is clear evidence that pupils are enjoying their learning and are ambitious to succeed. Pupils' attitudes to homework have been transformed. Clear systems are in place to ensure that pupils build on their learning through meaningful homework activities. Pupils and parents know that homework is an integral part of learning. Pupils now complete homework regularly and to a high standard. Pupils say that their enjoyment of lessons has improved considerably as lessons are better suited to their needs and consist of a wider range of 'fun learning activities'.

Behaviour across the school has improved due to strong leadership of this area. Heads of Year design individual action plans for pupils at risk of exclusion and provide intensive support to help pupils to get back on track. As a result, fixed-term exclusions have fallen considerably, including for disadvantaged pupils. As teaching and learning improves and expectations for behaviour are high, referrals for removal from class have reduced by a quarter. Pupils confirm that behaviour in lessons has improved and, during this visit, pupils were seen engaging well in their learning. This contributes to their improving rates of progress.

Leaders and governors are aware that despite the considerable improvements to teaching, learning and behaviour, similar improvements in developing the numeracy skills of pupils have been slow to be actioned. Leadership of this area is now established to address the concerns raised in the previous inspection report. Clear plans are in place to audit numeracy across the school. Leaders will then be able to ensure that mathematical techniques are taught consistently across subject areas. Interventions are currently in place to support pupils with weaker numeracy skills and additional teaching time is allocated in key stage 3 to support pupils and close

the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders know that this area for improvement is a priority for the coming months.

Governors have undertaken an external review of governance and are well placed to support the headteacher in driving change across the school. The new chair of governors has an accurate understanding of the key areas of strengths and areas for further improvement. Governors ask searching questions of leaders and ensure that leaders remain focused on the most urgent priorities for further action. For example, governors effectively hold leaders to account for the progress of disadvantaged pupils because they now have a secure understanding of the issues due to the pupil premium review they commissioned.

Undoubtedly, all members of the school community are working hard to improve the quality of education in the school. Leaders are beginning to reap the rewards of their efforts. There is an increase in the number of applications for places in Year 7 this year as the community acknowledges the improvements already evident. Pupils are also beginning to see the benefit of their efforts through the improved outcomes seen for current pupils.

External support

Leaders and governors have secured a wide range of support to ensure that the quality of education continues to improve. Currently, other local schools in the authority and the diocese, including Our Lady's Catholic High School, an outstanding school in Preston, provide support. Middle and senior leaders have also developed strong relationships with a range of other high-performing schools in the area.

Leaders benefit from strong support from the local authority and the diocese of Lancaster. Governors and leaders have also brokered support from external consultants who are experienced in school improvement. Governors and leaders have commissioned reviews of pupil premium spending and governance which have already taken place and their recommendations are now being acted on.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector