

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Neil Maslen
Interim Headteacher
St Boniface's Catholic College
21 Boniface Lane
Crownhill
Plymouth
Devon
PL5 3AG

Dear Mr Maslen

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Boniface's RC College

Following my visit with Marie Hunter, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13–14 June 2018, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2017. 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers, except in physical education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - addressing urgently the weaknesses in safeguarding procedures and processes, including in the sixth form
 - devising and implementing an effective improvement plan, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching, including through appraisal, and responding robustly where weaknesses are identified
 - ensuring that checks on teaching quality take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and the feedback gathered is used to develop a suitable programme of staff training
 - supporting leaders in developing the skills and confidence they need to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make more rapid progress
 - making sure that funding provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including Year 7 catch-up funding, is used effectively.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress by:
 - establishing an effective culture of safety and safeguarding in which bullying, discrimination and poor behaviour are not tolerated
 - raising expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning
 - ensuring that the school's approach to improving pupils' behaviour is effective and followed consistently
 - making sure that teaching interests and engages all pupils in their work, motivates them and helps them to make good progress.
- Improve attendance for all groups of pupils and rapidly reduce the proportion of pupils persistently absent from school.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations of achievement for all groups of pupils
 - identifying the needs of different groups of pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - using assessment information to identify the next steps in pupils' learning and

help them to catch up more effectively

- making sure that work is challenging enough to enable the most able pupils to reach higher standards
- maintaining a systematic focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills.

■ Improve the curriculum by:

- making sure that all pupils are following courses and programmes best suited to their needs and aspirations, including in the sixth form
- implementing a systematic approach to improving pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
- ensuring a planned and coherent approach to support pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development more effectively, including in the sixth form.

■ Improve the impact of leadership in the sixth form by:

- ensuring that record-keeping is accurate, of good quality and effective
- regularly evaluating the impact of provision in the sixth form, including the impact of teaching and the curriculum provided through the partnership.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 to 14 June 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils. They also held discussions with members of the interim academy board (IAB), including the new chair, and officers from the multi-academy trust, Plymouth CAST. Inspectors visited lessons in the company of senior leaders. During these visits, they talked to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. The lead inspector visited one of the school's post-16 alternative providers, Discovery College.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit in January 2018, the school has experienced considerable instability in its staffing due to absence. This led to an increase in the number of supply teachers being used by the school. The mathematics department was particularly affected and only recently has it returned to its usual complement of full-time staff.

School leaders have had to reduce a substantial projected budget deficit for 2018/19, which is partly a result of the reduction over time of the school's roll. As a result, significant restructuring of staff at all levels is under way. A number of staff have left, including the head of sixth form, and more will leave at the end of this academic year. The senior and middle leadership structures are being redesigned.

The IAB has a new chair. The previous chair is now focusing on providing mentoring support to the headteacher.

A new educational support manager from Plymouth CAST began to work with the school in May. The trust will have a new chief executive officer from July 2018.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher and his leadership team continue to provide a clear sense of direction to the school. This has helped to maintain staff morale at a time of considerable restructuring of staffing at all levels, including senior and middle leadership.

The most significant change in the leadership and governance of the school since the first monitoring visit in January 2018 has been the appointment of a new chair of the IAB in May 2018. This has made accountability for school improvement clearer. Following the inspection in May 2017, which judged the school to require special measures, the IAB had been closely involved in the operational development of the school, providing important support to the new headteacher. In spring 2018, the trust decided to ensure a clearer separation between operational support and

strategic oversight. As a consequence, a new chair of the IAB was appointed, with the previous chair continuing to support the headteacher in a mentoring role. This means that the IAB can focus clearly on holding those with operational responsibility for the school to account for improving the standard of education that pupils receive. These new arrangements have only been in place for a month: it is, therefore, not possible to comment on their long-term impact yet.

The trust, the IAB and the headteacher are currently engaged in restructuring the school's leadership and management arrangements. This is a well-reasoned response to the school's reduced roll and the need to set a balanced budget for 2018/19. In particular, the middle leadership of the school is being reorganised and slimmed down. This has the potential to make lines of accountability much clearer, but, as it has yet to be fully implemented, it is not possible to say what this restructuring will do to improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school.

School leaders have taken appropriate steps to deal with a period of unexpected instability in staffing, especially in the mathematics department. They drew on external support and provided additional interventions with the aim of minimising the impact of this situation on pupils' progress. Nonetheless, pupils' progress in mathematics was undoubtedly affected by these staffing difficulties. However, the mathematics department is now back to its usual staffing and pupils' progress is now improving.

Leaders are designing a new curriculum, which will be introduced in September 2018. This is conceived as producing a more coherent curriculum that, among other things, pays due regard to the school's Catholic religious character. This curriculum review process has clear steps and is well planned by leaders. What it lacks is a clear vision of what the curriculum should be like for this school in its particular context. Intentions are rather generic at the moment, rather than addressing the specific requirements of Catholic boys in Plymouth. In addition, leaders' understanding of how to evaluate this curriculum once it is in place is embryonic at the moment. They have not given enough attention to how they will know that their new curriculum has been successfully introduced. In addition, the goal they have set themselves of implementing a new curriculum in September 2018 is challenging, given the time available and the current fluidity of leadership arrangements, especially in middle leadership.

Leaders' understanding of how to evaluate the school's use of the pupil premium has developed quickly since January 2018. They monitor its impact closely through lesson observations and work scrutiny. As a result, they are able to use staff to provide well-targeted support to pupils in lessons. Nonetheless, as the school's own assessment tracking indicates, there is still work to be done to diminish the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others. The review of the use of the pupil premium recommended at the previous inspection in May 2017 will take place in July 2018.

Leaders are using the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium well to improve the progress of eligible pupils in these areas of their learning. Nonetheless, the wider drive to improve literacy across the curriculum for all pupils is still in its infancy. Pupils' errors and misconceptions are still not being systematically and successfully tackled in all subjects. This limits pupils' development of some of the basic building blocks of effective learning.

The school's safeguarding arrangements are effective, as they were at the first monitoring visit in January 2018. These arrangements are becoming more robust over time as they are embedded and the staff's understanding of safeguarding develops further. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the sixth form, which was an area of concern at the previous inspection in 2017. Arrangements to monitor the attendance and safety of students in the sixth form who attend alternative providers for part of the week are much stronger now.

The quality of sixth-form students' 16 to 19 study programmes is improving. These programmes now include better quality non-qualification activity than in the past. Leaders have successfully introduced a programme of personal, social and health (PSH) education for sixth-form students. This covers appropriate topics such as men's health, relationships, work-related learning and current affairs. As such, it makes a positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the rest of the school is also improving. There is a clear programme in place to deliver aspects of this through tutor time, which will be augmented next year by timetabled sessions in key stage 3. Pupils know right from wrong and have a developing understanding of life in modern Britain.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As it was at the first monitoring visit in January 2018, improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains the school's most significant challenge. Teaching is improving, but there is still too much variation in quality both between and within subjects across the curriculum.

The leadership of teaching is becoming increasingly effective in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The assistant headteachers with responsibility for this area of the school's work have a mature and systematic understanding of what needs to be done to improve teaching. They use effective monitoring of teaching to identify areas for further development. This then informs the school's programme of teacher training and development. The impact of this training, such as more effective questioning of disadvantaged pupils, can be seen in the classroom. However, it is not having a consistent impact in all areas.

Leaders are securing greater consistency from teachers as part of what they call

their 'back to basics' approach. Teaching is increasingly rising to the expectations that leaders set, but pupils are yet to experience consistency across the board. For example, leaders are very clear about how they wish teachers to give feedback to pupils, but there is still considerable variance in how this is done in practice.

Where teaching is more effective, it is characterised by thorough planning based on a clarity about what pupils need to learn and how to facilitate that. As a result, the work is pitched correctly to meet pupils' needs. Less effective teaching does not pay sufficient attention to pupils' starting points. When this occurs, the level of challenge is not high enough for pupils of all abilities, but especially the most able. This problem is compounded because there is still work to do to ensure that the school's assessments are robust and that they support teachers to plan securely for pupils to make progress from their differing starting points.

Teachers' rising expectations about what is an acceptable standard of work are beginning to have an impact. This can be seen in the work in some subjects such as mathematics and English. In science, teaching is not embedding clear and consistent standards in terms of the quality of work and its presentation. Teachers have had greater success in developing positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour in lessons across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have successfully sustained the recent improvements in pupils' behaviour. The new behaviour management procedures are now well embedded and the school is a calm and orderly environment, both in lessons and at other times. The need for teachers to use detention or internal exclusion to control behaviour has fallen dramatically this year. Pupils understand the new system and the clear consequences for any misbehaviour. They recognise that behaviour has improved this year and welcome the opportunity to focus more effectively on their studies. Improved behaviour goes hand-in-hand with improving attitudes to learning. Pupils are more engaged in their work and the quality of their work is improving, albeit inconsistently, across the curriculum.

Attendance is improving and the overall persistent absence rate is getting closer to the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a concern. On average they miss one day of school a fortnight and well over a quarter are persistently absent. Nonetheless, the persistent absence rate of disadvantaged pupils has improved from the very high figure in 2016/17. The school has successfully used intensive attendance improvement plans to reduce the absence of some pupils that are away from school frequently. The analysis of persistent absence, however, is not sharp enough. This means that leaders and the trust do not have a clear understanding of it and this is an obstacle to reducing it further.

Outcomes for pupils

As teaching improves, so do pupils' outcomes. For example, now that mathematics staffing is more stable, pupils are beginning to make better progress than in the recent past. They have, however, gaps in their learning that need to be plugged quickly.

The most able pupils and those who have intrinsic self-motivation are responding most quickly to improvements in teaching that are facilitating better progress. In science, for example, improvement in the quality of pupils' work is most evident in those doing three sciences at GCSE or in the higher sets in key stage 3.

Less able pupils and those who need help to develop the habits of successful learners are not responding as quickly. As a result, improvements in their progress are not as evident. Overall, therefore, teaching is still having an inconsistent impact on improving all pupils' academic outcomes.

Teachers are promoting literacy across the school by identifying key vocabulary clearly in lessons. This is, however, reinforced and embedded with variable impact and success. As a result, there remains a considerable amount of work to do to improve pupils' literacy. Too often, tasks set do not require pupils to develop secure, subject-specific literacy in order to complete them. Shortcomings in their literacy skills are a significant barrier for many pupils in making stronger progress and securing better academic outcomes.

External support

Outside of schools in the trust, the school is working most closely with St Cuthbert Mayne School in Torquay, whose headteacher is a member of the IAB. This school has provided important support in mathematics and training in the use of assessment information.