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Mr Martin Cain
Headteacher
Blessed Robert Sutton Catholic Sports College
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Dear Mr Cain

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blessed Robert Sutton Catholic Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in October 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 good.

The school should take further action to:

- address weaknesses in the quality of leadership and teaching in science and geography
- review strategies to improve attendance and take action to ensure that all pupils attend school more regularly

- ensure that improvement planning makes clear who is accountable for actions and the timescale in which the actions will be completed.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, pupils and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A series of short visits to lessons were undertaken and pupils' behaviour was observed at breaktime. Records of visits from the school's improvement partner, commissioned through Staffordshire local authority, and other relevant monitoring documents were reviewed.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to staffing at senior and middle leadership level. Two assistant headteachers have left the school and you and the deputy headteacher are leaving at the end of this academic year. There have been new heads of department in art, religious education, English, history and geography. The school will convert to an academy under the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust in September 2018.

Main findings

The strengths evident at the last inspection have been sustained. Pupils feel safe and are well looked after. Pastoral staff know their pupils well and use a broad range of external support to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The focus on developing reading in Years 7 and 8 has led to improved reading across the school. Pupils' personal development is well supported through assemblies and the form time curriculum.

Leaders, including governors, have taken the issues raised at the last inspection very seriously and the effectiveness of their response is evident in the considerable improvement in examination results in 2017. Overall, pupils made progress in line with national expectations. The most able and disadvantaged pupils made much better progress than in the previous year. Improvement was evident in all subject areas with the exception of geography and science.

There has been a significant improvement in English. A new subject leader and teaching team have put in place strong assessment practices to ensure that all pupils know how well they are doing and have precise guidance on how to improve. Pupils appreciate this support and the GCSE English examination results in 2017 showed a significant improvement on the previous year. Pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, made good progress in English last year and current school tracking data and evidence in pupils' books show that this is also the case for current pupils.

Disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress in the school because of more rigorous tracking and a systematic intervention programme for those pupils who are falling behind. A new, temporary, senior leader and a pupil premium coordinator have brought renewed energy to the support for disadvantaged pupils. They have acted on the findings of the pupil premium review that was recommended at the last inspection and have engaged with support from external partners. They have successfully introduced a number of strategies for class teachers to use that have raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils across the school.

Outcomes in the sixth form also improved significantly in 2017. A level and applied general outcomes show students are now making good progress. However, there is still considerable variation between different subjects. As a result, leaders have made sensible decisions about what courses to run in the sixth form and have put in place further support for students who are falling behind expectations.

Leaders have put in place a new behaviour and rewards policy, including a major change on the use of mobile phones. Pupils say that the new policy has clear sanctions that are consistently applied and behaviour has improved. Leaders point to fewer safeguarding issues and a reduction in cyber bullying issues since phones were banned in school.

The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved since the last inspection. However, whole-school attendance has dipped and current attendance is lower than in the previous two years. Leaders have provided considerable intervention and support for pupils with the very lowest attendance but further strategies are needed to improve overall levels of attendance.

Since the inspection, there has been a focus on increasing the accountability of heads of department through strengthened quality assurance reviews. Although many middle leaders are now providing very effective oversight of their departments, on occasions there is still an over-reliance on senior leader direction and support. The learning reviews, completed termly by heads of departments, provide an effective evaluation of all aspects of a department's performance and link closely to the school's improvement plan.

Pupils appreciate the consistent use of the school's praise, target, review assessment policy. They feel they are well supported by their teachers and work in most subjects has the right level of difficulty. High staff turnover in science and geography led to pupils complaining about repeating work and slow progress. Leaders are aware of these concerns and are taking action to improve this situation. The mathematics department effectively uses different levels of challenge in lessons through their bronze, silver and gold activities. Other departments are beginning to develop similar strategies to ensure that work is targeted at the right level, but these strategies are not yet consistently evident across the school.

Governors have acted effectively to address the issues raised on their performance in the previous inspection and the outcome of the governance review. They have refocused their work around their scrutiny committee where they use better quality assessment information from the school to ask questions that are more challenging. They are not willing to settle for underperformance and expect senior leaders to act rapidly to address concerns. There are now more regular governor link visits. The chair of the governing body now has an experienced mentor to help sharpen governance practice.

Although the school's improvement plan clearly addresses the issues raised in the previous inspection, the actions are often very broad and it is not clear who is accountable for doing what or in what timescale. Success indicators are often vague and not measurable, making it difficult for governors to track whether actions have been successfully implemented. You have undertaken an accurate review of the 2017/18 plan and identified appropriate further actions.

External support

The school has worked effectively with a number of external bodies and has an open approach to seeking help where it is needed. Leaders value the regular visits from their school's improvement partner. They have used these visits to carry out paired observations of teaching and to focus on areas of concern, including science and the sixth form. The Nottingham Diocesan Education Service also monitors the school, primarily on its external examination performance.

School leaders have also worked with the Arthur Terry Learning Trust, participating in a peer review project, sharing ideas and expertise with a number of local schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Ofsted Inspector