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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Fiona Wright
Headteacher
St Antony's Catholic College
Bradfield Road
Manchester
M41 9PD

Dear Mrs Wright

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Antony's Catholic College

Following my visit to your school on 26 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 has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- build on the work done so far to enhance the quality of teaching in English so that pupils' progress in this subject improves at an even faster pace.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the acting headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

I visited a number of classrooms, particularly in the English department, and conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work across several subjects. I also visited an exhibition of pupils' artwork and examined a range of documentation, including information relating to safeguarding and the progress of pupils currently in the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some alterations at leadership level, including governance. There have also been some changes in staffing, sometimes as a result of school leaders challenging underperformance. The number of support staff has decreased. The school has carried a substantial deficit for a number of years. School leaders have taken appropriate action and the school is now on target to be solvent in the near future. You have been appointed as substantive headteacher with effect from September 2018.

Main findings

This school had been troubled by underperformance for several years even before the previous inspection and the road to improvement has been rocky. School leaders have faced a number of obstacles in their mission to improve this school, not least of which has been the budgetary deficit. This has meant that the pace of improvement has not always been as swift as leaders would have liked; nevertheless, the tide has begun to turn and there are clear signs of improvement. This school is now well on the way to shaking off the 'requires improvement' judgement and becoming a good school.

Leaders have focused considerable energy on improving the quality of teaching and their efforts have not gone unrewarded; pupils I spoke to during the inspection were unanimous that, in their opinion, 'Lessons are good!' The revised system for monitoring pupils' progress helps teachers identify where pupils are falling behind. Teachers then put in place support to help pupils get back on track. Pupils spoke very favourably about the way that teachers help them on an individual basis. They identify this support as a substantial improvement in teaching since the previous inspection.

Pupils also expressed much enthusiasm for the improved behaviour management system. Pupils feel that this has radically reduced the incidence of low-level disruption: they maintained that the knowledge that there will be consequences to poor behaviour makes pupils think twice about committing a misdemeanour.

Leaders have maintained a strong trend of improvement in attendance. Pupils that I spoke to during the inspection said that they felt that improvements to teaching were a major contributory factor to improved attendance, along with the enticing rewards on offer if one attends school regularly.

In response to the findings of the previous inspection, leaders, in conjunction with the local authority, put together an action plan to tackle the areas for improvement. This plan was focused on the correct priorities but has proved unwieldy. School leaders are currently in the process of refining this plan so that it is better fit for purpose.

The school's self-evaluation remains on the generous side. It has a sharp focus on the analysis of pupils' outcomes, both historic and current, and appropriate links are made between the assessment of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. However, leaders are inclined, on occasion, to take the context of the school's individual journey too much into account, losing sight sometimes of how the school compares to local and national norms.

Outcomes for pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, have improved steadily since the previous inspection, albeit from a low base. I examined the school's own information on current progress during the visit and this indicated that improvements were evident across subjects and year groups. This was confirmed when I scrutinised pupils' work. The school's data demonstrates that pupils in Year 11 are working at a higher standard than their peers in the past, including in English, where performance has historically been weaker. Nevertheless, there remain some pockets of underperformance, and improvements in English have not been as rapid as in other subjects, such as mathematics. There is some evidence to suggest that at times teaching in English is still insufficiently challenging and does not build effectively on what pupils have already studied at primary school.

The school's standing in the local community has improved and this is demonstrated by an increasing demand for places. This is a school that, after a bruising couple of years, is now proud of its achievements and has the best interests of its pupils at heart. School leaders, including the astute and knowledgeable governing body, are united in their ambition to make St Antony's a good school by the time it is next inspected.

External support

As noted at the time of the previous inspection, the school has derived considerable benefit from its partnership with Loreto Grammar School. For example, you, the current acting headteacher, due to take up your substantive post in September, have been 'on loan' to the school from Loreto for over four years. The school also enjoys productive links with other schools in the local authority and the diocese of Salford.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector