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Mr James Lancaster
Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre
Stamford Road
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Dear Mr Lancaster

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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 three 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 recent section 5 inspection for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- rethink the rationale and suitability of a two-year key stage 3 curriculum in providing pupils with a secure foundation for their key stage 4 studies
- make the action plan more manageable.

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspector held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the archdiocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector evaluated the school action plan. He undertook learning walks with senior leaders and held meetings with other staff. The outcomes of monitoring activities and other relevant documentation were reviewed, including

the pupil premium review.

Context

The most significant changes have taken place in mathematics with a new head of department and new teachers. The chair of governors has stepped down and an acting chair of governors is in place. Leaders' responsibilities have been reviewed and all areas requiring improvement are led by a senior leader.

Main findings

Leaders were initially frustrated by the judgements of the 2017 inspection but quickly accepted its accuracy. A track record of three consecutive requires improvement judgements indicated that there was a degree of complacency. This is no longer evident at leadership level and the strengths in pastoral leadership that have long existed at the school are now being used to improve the academic provision for pupils.

The monitoring of teaching and learning is much more rigorous and is focused on how well teachers teach their subjects. This is underpinned by an extensive training programme for all staff. This programme has helped teachers to think more deeply about what they want pupils to learn in their subjects and how best pupils will learn. While this has brought about many benefits, the emphasis has too often been on attempting to develop skills without attention to the underpinning knowledge those skills must draw upon.

The provisional outcomes for 2018 show a decline in the outcomes of 2017 and are more in line with what pupils achieved in 2016. The progress of pupils was weak overall and particularly in mathematics. Several external factors contributed to this weak progress. While leaders identified a number of weaknesses in teaching that contributed to poor outcomes, other weaknesses in the curriculum became evident during activities on this visit. There has been too little focus on the acquisition of knowledge and this meant that pupils have entered examinations in a number of subjects not knowing enough of what they needed to have learned.

Leaders had sought to improve pupils' learning and progress at key stage 4 by introducing a 'transition' year into the curriculum at Year 9, with pupils choosing their option subjects in Year 8. The rationale and suitability of this were unconvincing and pupils who spoke to the inspector described key stage 3 as 'easy' and said that teachers challenged and expected much more of them when they entered Year 9. The key stage 3 curriculum is not being planned well enough and precious time is being wasted.

The willingness and urgency of leaders to improve provision were evident in leaders wanting to make immediate changes when inspection activities revealed where further improvements could be made. This is indicative of the shift in attitude of

leaders to see the school improve.

The attendance of pupils has improved and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has decreased, especially for those pupils who are disadvantaged. This is because of the determined work of pastoral leaders to tackle this area of improvement from the last inspection.

Governors took a long and hard look at themselves after the last inspection. As a result, they provide the right balance of support and challenge to the headteacher. They do not shy away from making difficult decisions and they ensure that leaders follow up on any decisions taken. They use the action plan as a tool to hold leaders to account. However, the plan is far too dense and what is most important is lost in the detail.

External support

Sefton local authority provides an adviser to offer significant support to subject leaders and teachers. Her advice is welcomed, and staff believe that her support has made a positive contribution to bringing about more effective leadership and teaching of subjects. The Archdiocese of Liverpool convened a monitoring group to hold leaders routinely to account for the implementation of the action plan. There is evidence of increased accountability and leaders taking difficult decisions in the best interests of pupils.

A review of the use of the pupil premium and the impact of the support in securing improvements in pupils' progress and attendance was carried out in December 2017. While it provided appropriate advice on what leaders needed to continue to improve, it did not identify the notable gaps in pupils' knowledge that needed additional support and intervention. However, leaders have identified appropriate strategies in their 2018/19 pupil premium plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector