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Mrs Catherine McCormack and Mr Tim Alderman
Interim Headteacher/Interim Executive Headteacher
St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School
Boardmans Lane
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Merseyside
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Dear Mrs McCormack and Mr Alderman

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School

Following my visit with David Hampson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 February 2019, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose

the school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers in English and mathematics before the next inspection.

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 St Helens. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2018

- Rapidly improve the quality of leadership and management across the school, by ensuring that:
 - the governing body provides strong and effective challenge for leaders
 - senior leaders fulfil their roles effectively
 - middle leaders have the role models and the skills that they need to improve the quality of teaching in their respective areas
 - expectations of what all pupils can and should achieve are raised
 - the curriculum is well planned and meets pupils' needs
 - the pupil premium funding is used effectively to stem the decline in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils
 - the systems for tracking pupils' progress, particularly at key stage 3, are effective.
- Significantly improve outcomes for pupils across the school.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessments accurately reflect where pupils are in their learning
 - teachers plan learning that meets the needs of pupils and challenges them to achieve at high levels.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare and welfare, by:
 - rapidly improving attendance and punctuality to school, especially for disadvantaged pupils
 - eradicating disrespectful and confrontational behaviour that stops other pupils from learning
 - helping pupils to regulate their own behaviour and develop resilience in learning.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be reviewed.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 to 13 February 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders. They spoke with the interim headteacher, the interim executive headteacher and several members of the governing body, including its chair. Inspectors spoke with representatives from the local authority, representatives from the archdiocese and the school's improvement partner. They met with groups of pupils and staff. They observed teaching and learning jointly with leaders and scrutinised samples of pupils' work. They observed how pupils behaved around the school during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the previous inspection there has been considerable change at the school. After the last inspection a new governing body was formed and a new chair was appointed by the archdiocese. The previous headteacher and the two deputy headteachers left the school towards the end of the academic year in which the last inspection took place. The archdiocese arranged for the appointment of an interim executive headteacher and an interim headteacher. These leaders started to work at the school at the beginning of the current academic year. The interim executive headteacher spends half of the working week at the school. The interim headteacher is at the school in a full-time capacity. They are both employees of schools located in Liverpool local authority. The senior leadership team has decreased in size since the previous inspection. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have changed in response to the school's priorities. The school's pastoral structures have also changed. The pastoral system is now focused on year groups rather than a 'house system'. The school has increased the number of pastoral leaders. There are now heads of year who work alongside pastoral leaders who are assigned to each year group.

There have also been changes made to middle leadership. A new coordinator of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education has been appointed, as has a new leader of literacy across the curriculum. The special educational needs coordinator has left the school and has been replaced by a temporary member of staff. There is currently no leader of humanities. A number of teachers have left the school since the previous inspection, including two teachers of science, a teacher of drama and a teacher of modern foreign languages. A number of non-teaching staff have also left. A number of long-term staff absences have increased the school's reliance on temporary members of staff. The length of the school day is due to increase after the February half-term holiday. The school is currently advertising for a substantive headteacher. Once this appointment is made, governors intend to advertise for a substantive deputy headteacher. The school has no plans to convert to an academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have taken significant strides towards overcoming some of the very significant challenges identified at the last inspection. New interim leaders have provided the school with clear direction, following a period of alarming decline. They have devised appropriate plans to improve the school in those areas requiring most urgent attention. Through their careful management, substantial improvements have been made to the school's ethos, pupils' behaviour and teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. This has led to improved morale throughout the school. Staff had become worn down by the school's ethos and pupils' behaviour. They described how an 'us and them' culture had developed between staff and pupils. Staff value the changes that have been made and greatly appreciate the renewed focus on building positive and respectful relationships with pupils. Pupils, particularly in younger year groups, are equally positive about the changes that have been made. They feel happier, safer and well supported in both their learning and personal development.

Despite this, leaders are under no illusions about the scale of the challenge still facing the school. They are aware that the school's improvement has been uneven since the previous inspection, particularly in relation to the development of teaching. They are also aware that their actions have had minimal impact on improving some of the most entrenched issues, such as pupils' poor attendance and the low achievement of disadvantaged pupils. This, coupled with the uncertainties surrounding the future leadership of the school, means that the school's position remains fragile, despite the significant steps that have been taken.

New leaders have taken swift and decisive action to address the most pressing issues facing the school. For example, they have changed the arrangements for grouping pupils to ensure that pupils are placed in classes that are based upon their ability rather than factors relating to their behaviour. This has contributed to the strong improvements that have been made to pupils' behaviour and learning. Leaders have also disbanded those systems that were deemed to be exacerbating the school's problems, such as the procedures for managing pupils' behaviour.

New leaders have complementary skills. The headteacher has led the development of pupils' behaviour and the school's ethos. The executive headteacher has taken the lead on improving teaching. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths, weaknesses and the rate of improvement in different areas. They recognise where clear improvements have been made but do not underestimate the amount of work that still needs to be done.

The roles of senior leaders have been revised to align with the most pressing school priorities. Established senior leaders are now more accountable for the impact of their work. They are managed closely by new leaders who relentlessly model the skills and qualities required for effective leadership. As a result, senior leaders are beginning to fulfil their roles more effectively, particularly in relation to their management of new pastoral systems.

Middle leadership has developed significantly. Middle leaders are now closely supported by senior colleagues. They have received training that has enabled them to play a greater role in developing teaching in their areas. They have strengthened systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching in their subjects. Some middle leaders, such as the heads of English and mathematics, have had a significant impact on improving teaching and pupils' outcomes. Despite this, the impact of middle leadership remains variable. This is reflected in the pronounced inconsistencies that remain in the quality of teaching across the curriculum.

The school's pastoral systems have been changed substantially because leaders recognised that they were not fit for purpose. The school's support for its most vulnerable pupils has been exceptionally weak in the past. This contributed to the deterioration in pupils' behaviour. Leaders have therefore enlarged the pastoral team. They have also utilised support from the local authority to develop the school's work in this area. Pastoral leaders are now developing a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This is beginning to ensure that they support the most vulnerable pupils and their families more consistently. Despite this, the school has struggled to support a significant number of pupils who have not had their needs well met in the past. This has resulted in a large number of pupils leaving to join other schools. It has also led to a number of pupils being placed on part-time timetables for too long. Although this situation appears to be improving, leaders' and governors' oversight of this aspect of the school's work has not been strong.

Leaders have used a number of strategies to communicate their higher expectations to staff and pupils. For example, they have made the academic targets that they set for pupils more challenging. New leaders have modelled the standards that they expect from staff. They have also provided staff with opportunities to see examples of effective practice in other schools. These actions have raised the expectations of most staff and pupils. Despite this, there are still significant pockets of staff whose expectations of pupils remain too low. This is clearly evident in teachers' inconsistent expectations regarding the quality of pupils' work and the variations in the extent to which they challenge pupils with the work that they set. Where middle leadership is most effective, such as in English and mathematics, teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils.

New leaders made urgent changes to the curriculum when they joined the school. They ensured that more time was given to the teaching of mathematics in Year 11 and that pupils currently in Year 9 study three optional subjects rather than two. They also ended additional sessions that were aimed at building the resilience of pupils in Year 9 in favour of a more holistic strategy for their personal development. Leaders have a clear rationale for the development of the curriculum and are keen to cater more effectively for pupils' needs. For example, they greatly value the performing arts as a vehicle for enhancing pupils' personal development and their cultural awareness. They are, therefore, exploring opportunities to introduce dance to the curriculum.

Leaders have carefully evaluated the quality of the curriculum in different subjects and are aware of some considerable limitations. For example, they have identified some subjects where teachers are not ensuring that pupils develop a sufficiently broad base of knowledge, particularly at key stage 3. They are also rightly concerned that too much of the curriculum is focused on preparing pupils for GCSE examinations when they do not have the knowledge, skills or understanding to benefit from such approaches. They have also identified some teachers who do not plan learning well over time.

Leaders have a clear vision for the development of teaching, learning and assessment. They have introduced new structures to help teachers to plan learning in a more consistent and effective way. This has helped to improve the general quality of teaching across the school. However, it has not ensured uniform improvement because weak curriculum planning and/or teachers' low expectations still undermine the impact of teaching in some areas. Significant variation also remains because leaders have not ensured that training for teachers is carefully targeted to address the needs of individuals and groups of teachers. This is particularly the case in departments without a subject leader and/or in departments that have only one or a small number of teachers.

Leaders are also aware of the deficiencies in the school's current use of the pupil premium funding. When the interim leaders arrived at the school, the money had already been spent on improving general staffing levels rather than targeting the spending on the specific barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils. New leaders have supported staff in developing a clear understanding of the barriers to achievement typically faced by disadvantaged pupils at the school. They have already launched an ambitious strategy to ensure that the need to improve the attendance, engagement and achievement of disadvantaged pupils is at the heart of the school's work. This work is in its early stages and has had limited impact. Some disadvantaged pupils are making better progress due to the improvements that have been made to teaching and behaviour. However, the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils still lags behind that of others in the school.

The newly formed governing body has supported improvement in some areas effectively. For example, it has managed the school's finances prudently. It is focused on challenging leaders to improve teaching, pupils' behaviour and academic outcomes. Despite this, governors have not overseen all aspects of the school's work well. For example, they have paid insufficient attention to the school's work with the most vulnerable pupils, including those on part-time timetables. Moreover, they have not overseen the school's central record of employment checks carefully, which has led to some administrative errors being made. Some of these weaknesses have emerged because governors have not been diligent in ensuring that they undertake the breadth of training that is required for them to fulfil all aspects of their roles effectively. A recent review of governance confirms some of these strengths and weaknesses.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have made some significant improvements to teaching and assessment which have resulted in most pupils learning more effectively. The improvements have been most dramatic in English and mathematics. Improvement in other areas is not as consistent or embedded.

The teaching of English has improved markedly. There are now consistent and established strengths across the department. For example, teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils. They provide pupils with demanding tasks that challenge them to produce high-quality work. Pupils receive very effective support to develop the technical accuracy, fluency and sophistication of their extended writing. They also teach pupils to evaluate text effectively and they provide pupils with modelled examples that enable them to understand how to develop their work.

The teaching of mathematics has improved at a similar rate. Teachers are now skilled at helping pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. They question pupils thoughtfully, which is helping pupils to apply their mathematical understanding to different situations. They carefully assess what pupils can and cannot do. This enables them to plan future learning which addresses gaps in understanding and to challenge those pupils that require more-demanding work.

The teaching of history continues to be an established strength of the school. Pupils typically describe history as 'interesting' and this is reflected in their positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have high expectations of the knowledge, concepts and ideas that pupils learn. They provide opportunities for pupils to write for a variety of different audiences and purposes. They also provide them with particularly effective support in developing their analytical writing.

The most able pupils are being challenged more effectively than in the past, particularly in English, mathematics and history. This is because leaders have focused on ensuring that they benefit from a more systematic approach to meeting their needs.

The quality of assessment has also improved. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, effective assessment is playing a key role in helping pupils to make stronger progress. Leaders have paid careful attention to ensuring that assessments are fit for purpose. However, less attention has been paid to ensuring that teachers are accurately evaluating pupils' attainment and the progress that they are making.

Despite these improvements, there are many aspects of teaching that remain weak. For example, the teaching of geography, science, religious education and modern foreign languages has not improved to the same extent as in other subjects. Teachers of these subjects have not developed the same high expectations as teachers in other areas. They do not consistently pitch work at an appropriate level,

which results in pupils often finding work too easy or too difficult. As a result, pupils' learning in these subjects remains superficial.

The legacy of poor teaching over time has created additional challenges. In particular, many pupils lack the knowledge and extensive vocabulary needed to be able to undertake more-demanding work. Leaders are aware of this impediment and have appointed a literacy coordinator to ensure that there is a more consistent and relentless focus on improving pupils' vocabulary and writing skills. However, this appointment is recent and so it is too early to see any clear signs of impact in this area.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly in lessons. Inspectors did not see any evidence of disrespectful or confrontational behaviour stopping others from learning. Moreover, they found low-level disruption to be rare. As a result, pupils are typically able to concentrate on their work and teachers are able to explain new ideas without being distracted. Pupils generally work hard during lessons, even when teaching is weak. This indicates that they are developing resilience and understand the characteristics of effective learning.

Pupils' behaviour around the school site has also improved. The atmosphere is now much calmer. Pupils are typically friendly and polite. Most show respect towards staff and each other. This indicates that most pupils are now regulating their own behaviour effectively. Despite this, inspectors heard several pupils use prejudicial and derogatory language towards others during the inspection. This indicates that pupils' understanding of issues relating to equalities, particularly in relation to sexual orientation, disability and gender, is superficial at best. Leaders are aware of this and, as a result, have prioritised the development of this aspect of pupils' personal development. They have also changed the school's PSHE curriculum significantly to ensure that greater attention is paid to these issues.

Leaders have a clear strategy for improving attendance. The school is now far more methodical in the way that it supports and challenges pupils who are regularly absent. Staff promote the virtues of regular attendance and pupils with good attendance are rewarded. There are some early signs that this work is beginning to have a positive impact. For example, a number of pupils with poor attendance in the past are now attending more regularly. Despite this, the overall number of absences for the current year is higher than at the same point last year. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils who are classed as persistently absent remains very high. Rates of absence remain particularly high for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. Punctuality also remains a cause for concern and the number of times that pupils have been recorded as being late to school is higher than last year.

Outcomes for pupils

The 2018 outcomes for pupils in Year 11 showed modest improvement on the previous year. Improvements were seen in pupils' overall progress and progress in English, mathematics, technology and the arts. Girls and pupils of low- and middle-ability made much better progress than their counterparts in the previous year. Despite these improvements, pupils' progress in science and geography remained very weak. The progress of boys, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils did not improve to the same extent as that of others in the school.

Leaders' information indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 have made slightly more progress than their counterparts from the previous year by the same point, particularly in English and mathematics. It also indicates that the most able pupils are making significantly better progress than in the past.

Leaders have introduced systems to enable them to monitor and evaluate the progress being made by pupils in key stage 3. However, these systems are in their infancy and, due to the limited amount of information that leaders have, they are unable to reliably gauge how effectively pupils are learning over time. Despite this, leaders' information clearly indicates that a high proportion of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, have current levels of attainment that are below where they expect them to be at this stage.

A scrutiny of pupils' work provided compelling evidence to support that gathered elsewhere. Pupils' work confirms that they, including the disadvantaged and most able, are making much stronger progress in English and mathematics. The evidence also confirmed that weaknesses remain in pupils' learning in science and geography and that the variation in the progress of disadvantaged pupils remains stark. Some disadvantaged pupils are clearly doing well and responding positively to the general improvements that have been made to teaching. However, others continue to make limited progress and are not helped effectively to take greater pride in their work.

External support

The interim executive headteacher and interim headteacher were appointed by the archdiocese. They have been able to bring about significant improvements to teaching and pupils' behaviour. Both leaders have been able to use support from their own schools to help staff, as new procedures and ways of working are introduced. The headteacher has used her contacts at Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School to support the school's strategies for improving behaviour. The executive headteacher has used his staff from St Julie's Catholic High School to support the improvements that have been made to teaching, learning and assessment.

The local authority has provided significant support to improve the school's work with vulnerable pupils. This is beginning to have a positive impact. The school has also worked closely with Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School to improve

the teaching of mathematics and the Year 7 curriculum. This has contributed to the significant improvements that have been made to the teaching of mathematics. The school also has a new improvement partner who has played a key role in developing the effectiveness of middle leadership. Despite this, not all external support has had a positive impact. For example, the support put in place to develop the science department has had minimal impact. Added to this, the archdiocese and local authority have not worked closely enough to ensure that there is a cohesive plan in place to provide the school with comprehensive ongoing support. The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose because it does not explain how the local authority and governing body will meet their duty to facilitate the school's conversion into an academy.

- To ensure that the school continues to improve, leadership and management should be strengthened, by:
 - ensuring that the local authority and archdiocese work closely together to provide the school with a comprehensive package of ongoing support, particularly in relation to those areas of the school's work that remain weak
 - strengthening oversight, including among governors, of the school's work with the most vulnerable pupils
 - reducing the pronounced variation that remains in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment between subjects
 - ensuring that pupils' literacy skills are developed effectively across the curriculum so that pupils have the vocabulary and writing skills to achieve well in a range of subjects
 - developing the curriculum in each subject so that teachers plan effectively for pupils' learning over time
 - making sure that the school's use of the pupil premium funding is focused on removing identified barriers to learning
 - further developing the school's promotion of issues relating to equality to reduce the amount of prejudicial and discriminatory language used by pupils.