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Ms Karen Smyth
Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School
Honeysgreen Lane
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Merseyside
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Dear Ms Smyth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 2019, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the curriculum in the sixth form better meets the needs of students
- reduce further the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, including the senior leader with responsibility for the sixth form. A learning walk was undertaken with a senior leader. I scrutinised pupils' work alongside a senior leader and the middle leaders of mathematics and history. I also considered a range of

documentation relating to school improvement, including leaders' self-evaluation. I evaluated the school action plans.

I spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I also held a meeting with a representative from the Archdiocese of Liverpool. I met with a group of pupils, a group of staff and three members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors. I also checked on leaders' systems to ensure that adults at the school are safe to work with pupils.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership team and the governing body. There have also been some changes to staffing. Two new governors have joined the governing body. At senior leadership level, there have been a leadership restructure and changes to senior leaders' roles and responsibilities.

A deputy headteacher has left the school to work on a temporary secondment at another school. You have appointed a new senior colleague to be responsible for leading teaching and learning. You have also appointed a new senior leader to oversee leaders' use of the pupil premium funding. Since the last inspection, three teachers have left the school and two newly qualified teachers have been appointed in mathematics.

Main findings

You and your senior leadership team have not shied away from tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Firstly, you were quick to make changes to improve the leadership of the school. For instance, you made swift and effective changes to the senior leadership team and their responsibilities. As a result, there is greater clarity around the role of each senior leader. Each senior leader now has a prime focus. This has made it easier for you and the governing body to check on the impact of senior leaders' actions. Consequently, you can hold senior leaders to account for their actions more diligently. For example, there is a sharper focus on how well leaders use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils.

You have ensured that leaders' plans to improve the school are appropriate and highly focused. You have also identified which staff are accountable for different areas of school improvement plans. There have been improvements in how well leaders are held to account at every level. This means that they are taking effective action to improve the areas that inspectors identified. This includes the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

You have also strengthened the leadership of the school by providing effective training and support to develop the skills of middle leaders. There have been

improvements in the quality of support that senior leaders provide for middle leaders. This means that middle leaders review the quality of teaching in their own subjects regularly. Middle leaders have focused plans to improve the quality of teaching in their own subjects. This has increased the pace at which inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are eradicated. Consequently, a higher proportion of pupils benefit from teaching that is routinely good than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils who left the school in 2018 made greater gains in their learning across several subjects, including English and mathematics.

Several middle leaders are benefiting from training programmes to help them become more effective in their roles. This training is having a positive effect on different aspects of the school. For instance, the subject leader of history is helping leaders of other subjects to embed a more challenging curriculum. As a result, there is a bigger focus on the knowledge that pupils acquire over time. Teachers across the school place a greater emphasis on how well pupils remember the most important knowledge. This is having a positive effect on the progress that pupils make over time.

Following the previous inspection, you ensured that a timely review of the pupil premium funding was completed by a national leader of education (NLE). Leaders have been keen to act on the recommendations made in this external review. Their actions have secured improvements in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. Subsequently, you requested a second review of this aspect of the school. This second review allowed you to check on the improvements made. The school is now working with other schools to share the strategies that have worked well. The differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils at the school and other pupils nationally are diminishing.

Since the last inspection, leaders have worked effectively to improve the quality of teaching across the school. This is especially the case in mathematics and history. Leaders' strategies to improve teaching are informed by research. They focus their efforts on those strategies that work well. Moreover, leaders regularly review the impact of their actions to check they are having a positive effect. Where necessary, they refine their approach.

You have fostered strong links with local schools. This is allowing staff the opportunity to share good practice with colleagues in other schools. Staff have responded positively to the training that they receive. They have embraced the opportunity to improve their own teaching and they feel highly valued. Staff morale is high. They feel that leaders are supportive of their well-being and take appropriate steps to reduce their workload.

Improvements in the quality of teaching are visible in pupils' work. For instance, in mathematics, teachers sequence learning to allow pupils to build well upon their prior learning. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to challenge pupils and support them to overcome misconceptions. In history, pupils have a strong

understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. They use this prior learning to inform their responses to more challenging learning. Current pupils are making greater gains in their learning than pupils in the past in both subjects. This is especially the case in history.

Pupils' rates of absence increased in the last academic year. Leaders acted to stem the decline in pupils' rates of attendance. They have implemented a range of strategies to improve pupils' attendance. These are having a positive effect. Pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is now in line with the national average. However, despite significant improvement in this area, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school remains above the national average for all pupils.

The progress made by students studying A-level courses in the sixth form has declined over the last two years. Students studying A-level courses who left the school in 2018 made particularly weak progress. The progress made by this group of students placed the sixth form in the bottom 20% nationally. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form. They have already acted to improve outcomes for students.

Leaders have made changes to the way that they monitor the quality of teaching in the sixth form. This has secured some improvements in the progress that students make. Consequently, students in the sixth form are making greater gains in their learning than students in the past. Leaders have also made changes to the curriculum in the sixth form. These changes, alongside improvements to the careers advice and guidance that pupils receive in Year 11, mean that more students choose to study courses that better meet their needs. Nonetheless, there is still some work to do to ensure that the curriculum in the sixth form meets the needs of students.

Systems to ensure that staff at the school are safe to work with pupils are effective. Staff understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil. Pupils explained to me how they feel safe in the school and they are confident that any issues they report to a member of staff would be dealt with effectively.

External support

Leaders have been proactive in drawing on external support where appropriate. For example, two external reviews of the pupil premium funding by an NLE have been highly effective in improving the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

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 Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory

Her Majesty's Inspector