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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Tony McGuinness
Headteacher
All Saints Catholic High School
Roughwood Drive
Kirkby
Knowsley
Merseyside
L33 8XF

Dear Mr McGuinness

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to All Saints Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body, subject leaders, pupils and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. During the visit, I undertook a number of activities including a learning walk with the headteacher, scrutiny of documentation and pupils' books and observation of an assembly.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 13 members of staff have left the school. Twenty-one new members of staff have joined the school, including a primary specialist. There

have been changes at leadership level, including the appointment of a new assistant headteacher, head of sixth form, head of geography and head of computer studies. The school, with the support of the local authority, has embarked upon a building programme to provide a state-of-the art pitch for school and community use. There have also been substantial investments in information technology to support learning and the development of literacy.

Main findings

All Saints Catholic High School has not stood still since the previous inspection. There has been a concerted effort by all involved to propel the school forward at a swift pace. Your leadership of this school, recognised as a strength at the previous inspection, is second to none. You lead by example and your high visibility both in the school and the local community is evidence of your devotion to your mission. You will not rest until All Saints is judged a good school.

You have inspired staff and pupils alike to believe in themselves: they feel valued and high expectations abound. When I asked pupils why their school is now oversubscribed, they were virtually unanimous in declaring: 'It's our headteacher; he is what has made the difference.' Nevertheless, I agree with your point of view that the passion, hard work and commitment of all staff have been major contributory factors to the school's continued trajectory of improvement.

The governing body is knowledgeable and well-informed. Governors receive useful information from you to indicate strengths and abiding weaknesses. They do not shirk their responsibility to hold you to account. The support and challenge provided by the governing body has also been a key feature underpinning improvement.

You have made sure that improvements at middle leadership level, discernible at the previous inspection, have been consolidated. You have brought about a cultural shift and lines of accountability are much clearer than when you first arrived at the school.

The key area of improvement since the previous inspection has been the school's approach to the development of the curriculum, although school leaders acknowledge they 'are not there yet'. Subject leaders have taken responsibility for overhauling the curriculum, particularly at key stage 3, and improvements are tangible.

The subject leaders I met showed an excellent grasp of what pupils need to learn to achieve well. They have appreciated opportunities to visit primary schools in order to design a curriculum for key stage 3 that builds successfully on prior learning. For example, when I examined Year 7 history books, it was clear that the curriculum in history was appropriately challenging and represented progression on what had already been learned. Pupils I spoke to enjoy history and a considerable number of Year 11 pupils intend to take the subject at A level. The subject leader articulated

effectively his belief that by ensuring that pupils know and can remember more about history they will also go on to do well in their public examinations.

Teachers are keen to learn from best practice and have the opportunity to do so by observing colleagues' lessons and gaining new ideas. This has helped to raise expectations and improve teachers' skills. School leaders have challenged underperformance and every member of staff I spoke to was proud to work at All Saints. They share your passion to make a difference, especially to those pupils who experience considerable difficulties in their lives. Staff absence has reduced, and pupils can feel more confident that they will be taught by their regular teachers, rather than by temporary staff. Recruitment has been a challenge to the school, but you make it a priority to care for your staff and therefore retention of good teachers is not a problem.

Outcomes for pupils are improving steadily across the school because the curriculum is better. The school has adopted an innovative approach to improving boys' progress in English because outcomes in this subject have been particularly poor. This initiative has proved popular with boys but there are still signs that many boys do not relish reading. School leaders know this is an obstacle to these pupils' future academic success and are taking steps to encourage all pupils, but especially boys, to read more often and widely.

The most able pupils have benefited from improvements to the curriculum and according to school leaders are in a better position to achieve their potential than at the time of the previous inspection. This was evident in books and when I spoke to pupils. Visits to universities and information about high-quality apprenticeships have inspired pupils to be aspirational. Most pupils I spoke to were keen to go on to higher education even though many of their parents had never had the opportunity to do so.

Nevertheless, you do not rest on your laurels and you know there is still work to be done to ensure that all pupils make the very best of their time at All Saints. For example, some pupils currently in Year 11 are underachieving in some subjects. Although school leaders are keen to point out there are no excuses for poor performance, it is worthy of note that these pupils suffered very poor teaching when the school was in special measures. Furthermore, the design of the school was at that time, according to staff and pupils, not conducive to learning: for example, there were no walls between classrooms, which led to confusion, disruption and very little learning. One of the first things you did was to make sure that classrooms were reinstated so that teachers could teach, and pupils could learn. All the older pupils I spoke to, including students in the sixth form, mentioned the lack of walls between classrooms as a great impediment to their progress. They are hugely grateful to you for sorting this out.

Pupils are proud of their school and its improving profile in the local community. During my visit, I observed an assembly and pupils' behaviour was impeccable.

They listened intently to their teacher, showing considerable courtesy and respect for one another. The assembly was thought-provoking and very moving. When I discussed with pupils how this assembly had made them feel, one pupil reflected: 'It has really made me think about how I can help other people.'

External support

The school has benefited from incisive support from a local authority adviser and from the Archdiocese of Liverpool. This support has helped school leaders gain an accurate view of their effectiveness and consequently they have been in a position to design plans for improvement that address the correct priorities.

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 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector