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11 July 2019

Mr Paul Dickinson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Dickinson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Archbishop Beck Catholic College**

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, pupils, students in the sixth form and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I conducted a learning walk jointly with a senior leader. I examined a sample of work in a range of subjects and across different year groups. I also scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on safeguarding.

#### **Context**

There have been many changes to staffing since the previous inspection, including at leadership level. You have appointed a senior leader, a specialist leader in

education and three new teachers in mathematics. You have also established new leadership in science, in addition to appointing three new teachers in this subject. A new head of the geography department is in post, along with two new teachers. You have also strengthened the history department and appointed further teachers across a range of subjects.

## **Main findings**

You are justifiably proud of the impressive improvements that you and senior leaders have made to Archbishop Beck since the previous inspection. Firmly at the helm, you have steered the school well through the choppy waters of change, for example with the radically revised GCSE and A-level examinations. Together, you and your hardworking staff are determined that the school will be in pole position to be judged to be providing a good quality of education at its next inspection.

Governors continue to make a strong contribution to the leadership of the school. Knowledgeable and passionately committed to improvement, they provide incisive challenge and well-judged support to drive the school forward. Governors are well informed and have a firm grasp of where the strengths and weaknesses are. They use all the tools at their disposal to hold staff to account for their areas of responsibility.

You have invested heavily in improvements to leadership and teaching. This has led to improved outcomes for all pupils, including those that are disadvantaged. The funds to support disadvantaged pupils have been spent wisely. As a result, the gaps between the progress of these pupils and that of other pupils nationally are diminishing quickly.

You have initiated a root-and-branch overhaul of the curriculum. This has been a key factor underpinning the school's trajectory of improvement. For example, you have moved from a two-year to a three-year key stage 3. This has led to a more balanced and broad curriculum offer, providing pupils with more scope to study subjects in greater depth. In addition, all departments have had to revise their schemes of work and reconsider how the building blocks of learning in their subject are best placed. You have provided opportunities for subject leaders to plan learning collaboratively with their colleagues. This has led to a more cohesive approach to the curriculum.

Subject leadership has improved in mathematics, science and geography. The mathematics department, in particular, is extremely well led. During my visit, a senior leader explained carefully her overarching rationale for what is taught, and when, in mathematics. The leader had taken careful account of how learning is structured in her specialism. Her eyes gleamed as she talked enthusiastically of the 'magic and mystery of mathematics'. It was no surprise to find that many pupils I spoke to during my visit enjoy mathematics. Furthermore, outcomes in this subject, which were once weak, are improving strongly. Effective liaison between the mathematics and the science department has also helped pupils to understand

certain concepts that are covered in both subjects. For example, pupils explained to me that, as a result of a more consistent approach by their teachers, they could now use algebra more effectively when learning physics.

The sixth form remains a strength of the school. There is an unswerving emphasis on students' academic development. Leaders are swift to react if there is any sign of underperformance. For example, after a slight dip in outcomes in 2018, leaders completely revised assessment procedures to improve students' preparation for the changes to examinations. Leaders ensure that students get off to a flying start, by insisting on the highest standards of application to their studies from the moment they join the sixth form. Programmes to support students' wider development, such as work experience, are also well established. Students are encouraged to be ambitious for their future. They appreciate the good careers guidance they receive to inform their next steps. Students I spoke to seemed pleased that they had chosen to pursue their post-16 studies at Archbishop Beck.

Senior leaders have established a well-structured programme of professional development, designed to help teachers to improve their skills. This programme has been highly effective in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, during the visit I witnessed some teachers using questioning techniques well to tease out and address pupils' misconceptions.

Senior leaders now insist on all teachers planning lessons that incorporate opportunities to consolidate prior learning. You maintain that this helps pupils to recall what they have already learned. At the same time, you affirm, this process flags up gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers can then adapt their teaching to ensure that pupils make gains in their learning.

Nevertheless, you are not complacent. There are some abiding weaknesses, such as in history, that the school has found more difficult to overcome. In this subject, at times, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. For example, during the visit, I spoke to a group of very able pupils. They gave a coherent account of how the conditions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles had contributed to Hitler's rise to power. However, when I examined their books, I found that the same pupils were sometimes given work that was far too easy and did not support their progress in this subject.

Pupils I spoke to during my visit were visibly proud of their school. They particularly appreciate the school's support for their mental health and well-being. They said that they and their fellow pupils do not tolerate bullying 'because it is unkind'. Pupils also said that the school encourages them to respect diversity. During my visit behaviour was impeccable. Pupils respect each other and their teachers. The school provides a calm and orderly environment, which is highly conducive to learning. Overall attendance has improved since the previous inspection, and this includes the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. However, although the rate of persistent absenteeism of disadvantaged pupils has reduced markedly it remains too high.

## **External support**

The school works collaboratively with St John Bosco Arts College to provide more subject choices in the sixth form. The school also draws on support from the local authority and the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

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

Joan Bonenfant  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**