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Mr Paul Halliwell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Halliwell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Francis Xavier's College

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 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:

- continue to develop curriculum plans in all subjects, including in the sixth form, so that pupils build on what they already know.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made short visits to lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at work in their books. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with a senior leader. I took account of documents provided by

senior leaders and evaluated the school improvement plan and the school's self-evaluation document. I reviewed the school's safeguarding policies and checked the single central record.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced significant changes in senior leadership. The executive headteacher and interim headteacher who were present at the last inspection left in 2018. The deputy headteacher was acting headteacher from October 2018 to February 2019. A new head of school and executive headteacher led the school from February 2019 to July 2019. In total, five members of staff left the school in July 2019.

In September 2019, 10 members of staff, including the headteacher, one additional deputy headteacher and one subject leader, joined the school. The new deputy headteacher is responsible for teaching and learning and is seconded from a local school for one academic year. Two pastoral leaders have also been seconded to the senior leadership team to develop their skills further and provide extra capacity. The governing body has reduced in size and changed its committee structure so that it can be more effective.

Main findings

Leaders, governors and staff have worked with a sense of urgency to bring about the necessary change since the previous inspection. This has led to improvement in many areas of the school, despite the considerable turbulence in senior leadership.

Since your appointment as headteacher this month, you have galvanised the staff into one team and you are restoring their morale after an unsettling period. You are ambitious for pupils and want to improve their life chances. You and your leaders know the strengths and areas for development across the school. You have identified additional priorities for the school and are refining the improvement plan to move the school further forward.

A revised behaviour policy was implemented in the summer term of 2019. You increased expectations of pupils' behaviour further this month. Pupils and staff say that behaviour has improved. The school is a calm and orderly place.

Middle leaders are acquiring the necessary skills to hold teachers to account for the standards that pupils achieve. Middle leaders value the opportunities that they have to work together, and with colleagues from other schools, to share good practice and develop their subject curriculum further.

A renewed focus on the curriculum and how this is taught is at the heart of improvements in the school. Leaders have established a cycle of checking the quality of teaching and learning through visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils'

work. Leaders ensure that staff receive support and training where these are needed.

Pupils who spoke with me during the inspection said that they enjoy their lessons. During my short visits to lessons, I found that pupils have positive relationships with each other and their teachers. Teachers' expectations of pupils are increasing. Some teachers use questioning well to probe and develop pupils' understanding. Some teachers make effective use of information about pupils to plan tasks that challenge them and deepen their learning. However, this is not the case across all subject areas.

Leaders have reviewed the whole-school curriculum and made a number of changes to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. Pupils now have a wider choice of subjects at key stage 4, including vocational subjects. In the recent past, leaders entered pupils in Year 10 for GCSE English Literature. This has now ceased.

The 2019 provisional GCSE examination results indicate that pupils made better progress than previously. There were signs of improvement in pupils' progress in mathematics, science and religious education. Nonetheless, the progress that pupils made in these subjects was still not good enough, given their ability and starting points. In part, pupils' slower progress was due to changes in staffing and a weaker curriculum.

Middle leaders have reviewed their subject curriculum and the order of subject content. Schemes of work in mathematics now include more opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. You know that some subject curriculum plans require further refinement to ensure that pupils' knowledge and understanding build over time.

Your leaders regularly review the effect of pupil premium funding on disadvantaged pupils. Staff provide disadvantaged pupils with more focused support for their learning. Actions taken to date have secured some improvements in the progress made by these pupils. You are aware that the achievement of those who are disadvantaged is a priority. You have strengthened the leadership of this area by appointing a pupil premium champion to share good practice and to raise the aspirations of these pupils.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is close to the national average. Leaders reward pupils for coming to school regularly and have had some success with improving rates of attendance of individual pupils. Rates of attendance and persistent absence of pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are improving, but they are still below average.

In the sixth form, progress in academic subjects dipped to below the national average in 2018. The sixth-form leader implemented a range of strategies to

improve achievement in the sixth form. Provisional examination results in 2019 indicate that students' progress improved in a range of subjects. Nonetheless, there is still work to do to ensure that students acquire the knowledge that they need to progress through the curriculum in all subjects.

Governors are committed to the school's continuous improvement. They know what is working well and what needs to improve further. Governors hold senior and middle leaders to account through regular meetings with them.

Safeguarding arrangements remain effective. Rigorous checks are conducted to ensure that all staff are safe to work with children. Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe and know whom to go to if they have any worries. They feel that staff act quickly to resolve any issues that they have.

External support

The school improvement advisers from the local authority know the school well and provide appropriate challenge and support to senior leaders. The local authority, together with the archdiocese, have brokered the support of experienced school leaders from local schools over the last two years. This has helped to provide extra capacity in certain areas, such as in developing the curriculum and in improving teaching and learning. They also have excellent links with other local schools, which are used well to support school improvement.

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

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector