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Mrs Carol Buchanan
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Dear Mrs Buchanan

SCHOOLS WHERE THE PUPILS' BEHAVIOUR HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A CONCERN BY INSPECTION: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CARDINAL NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Dacombe, John Carnaghan and Kathryn England, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 26 and 27 April 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, several senior and middle managers, two governors and groups of pupils.

Context

Since the inspection of October 2005 the school has had a number of significant staff changes through resignations or long-term illness.

Achievement and standards

The 2005 test results for fourteen-year-olds show that standards were broadly average in English and science but below average in mathematics. The progress made by pupils from when they arrived at school in Year 7 to the end of Year 9 was broadly average. The 2005 GCSE results showed some encouraging improvement. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C rose from 42% in 2004 to 50% in 2005, and was the highest reached in recent years. However, the progress pupils made as they moved through Key Stage 4 was less than it ought to have been given their prior attainment and the school is very aware that there is more to do to raise standards further and to tackle underachievement. One important breakthrough for the school was that the achievement of the boys in 2005 improved significantly, largely due to the school's efforts to tackle the poor progress of boys in previous years.

The progress made in lessons was mostly satisfactory. It was good in a few lessons and inadequate in one. Pupils' progress was invariably linked to the quality of the teaching.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils have benefited from the close attention paid by the school to aspects of their personal development since the last inspection. An appropriate variety of initiatives has ensured that attitudes and behaviour have improved and that life at the school is more harmonious. The Catholic ethos of the school promotes spiritual development, mutual understanding and tolerance well.

Behaviour out of lessons is good and there are few problems when moving around the complicated site. Behaviour in lessons is usually at least satisfactory and in many circumstances good. Pupils enjoy most lessons and their attitudes are generally calm and purposeful, they focus on their work well. Relationships with teachers and with other pupils are friendly and constructive. Where the teachers' management of behaviour is less assured or sometimes where teachers are new to the school, there can still be misbehaviour. This happens more rarely than at the time of the last inspection. The pupils report that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. These improvements are reflected in a sharp fall in the number of exclusions last term.

Effective innovations to improve attendance and punctuality are having a positive impact. Attendance figures are now very close to the national average and the slight downward trend in previous years has now been reversed. Fewer pupils are now late to school.

Progress on the area for improvement identified in the inspection in October 2005:

- attitudes towards others—good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning in the 28 lessons observed was satisfactory overall. It was good in about half, satisfactory in half and inadequate in one.

In well taught lessons, thoughtfully structured and exciting activities and a good variety of challenging tasks, together with the teachers' sharp questioning and clear explanations, motivated pupils and helped them to learn effectively. The use of praise and positive re-enforcement helped to maintain the pupils' motivation. As a consequence, the pupils worked with purpose, maturity, cooperation, and enthusiasm. They showed respect and made good progress.

In weaker lessons, some activities were too mundane and teachers talked for too long, so did not captivate the pupils' imagination. Teachers did not ask sufficiently probing questions to check how much the pupils knew and understood. The result was that teachers had insufficient information on which to plan subsequent work and so their expectations were sometimes too low. In these lessons, pupils complied with their teachers' instructions, but there was no real enthusiasm or interest in learning, even though progress was generally satisfactory. Pupils reported that a few teachers still cannot control their classes. Where teaching was inadequate the class was noisy, pupils talked when the teacher was talking and the pupils' progress was inadequate.

Although there are sound systems for tracking pupils' progress over time, further work is needed to develop teachers' skills in making ongoing assessments as their lesson unfolds, checking the pupils' understanding and adapting the lesson where necessary. Some teachers mark the pupils' books well, but there are considerable inconsistencies in the quality of marking across the school.

The school has recently made changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, primarily affecting pupils now in Year 10. Modern languages and technology are no longer compulsory subjects and there is, therefore, a greater degree of choice and flexibility for pupils. This has helped to match the curriculum better to pupils' interests and contributed to improvements in pupils' attitudes. Year 11 pupils talked positively about the introduction of more practical styles of learning. Combined with other initiatives, the impact of

these changes is reflected in a reducing number of pupil referrals through the discipline system. At the same time, pupils in Year 10 now follow one less examination course, making their timetables a little less crowded.

The school has very good links with a local federation of schools and colleges. This provides a good range of vocational options for pupils with about 20 pupils in Year 10 involved. With very low drop out rates this provision adds a positive dimension to the curriculum.

Pupils commented very positively on the extra-curricular provision. Sport is very popular throughout the school and older pupils were enthusiastic about the range of trips and visits. Many departments run extra sessions to help pupils prepare for tests and examinations. This aspect of provision is a strength of the school which is helping to engage and motivate pupils.

Reflecting its Catholic principles, the school provides a good standard of care. Efforts to praise pupils' successes have developed a more positive ethos. Pupils have welcomed improvements in the chaplaincy; in particular, they value the new 'bully buddies' system. The careful attention paid to pupils who are vulnerable, those who have learning difficulties or disabilities and those at risk of exclusion has been very successful in integrating them into school life.

Pupils say that they know who to approach if they need support or advice and they feel safe and happy at school. They receive helpful information about future choices and, in particular, speak warmly about the availability of high quality careers advice and guidance. Pupils following examination courses know the level they are expected to attain by the end of the course and are regularly updated as to the best technique required to improve on these grades. They are assisted further by many after-school help sessions offered by each subject.

All these factors, together with close monitoring of behaviour and attendance, have helped to ensure good improvements in pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

Leadership and management

As headteacher, you have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are using a number of appropriate strategies to make improvements. The school has developed a purposeful sense of direction. You have introduced a more structured approach to leadership and management, increased accountability, and communicated well to staff, governors, pupils and parents. You have the confidence of those who work with you. You value the views of others and, whereas you are giving a positive steer to the school's work, you also allow staff the leeway to develop some of their own solutions to problems. The work of other senior and middle managers is more

variable and some are growing into their areas of responsibility more effectively than others. However, all are committed to moving the school forward. The management structure is still evolving to allow staff to develop the necessary leadership skills. Currently, the management of departments is shared between the headteacher and members of the senior team. The school acknowledges that there needs to be a greater level of consistency and clarity in these processes. At present, the monitoring of the implementation and impact of new initiatives is not always sufficiently effective. Nonetheless, the school's self-evaluation is satisfactory and the leadership team responded to the issues raised in the inspection of October 2005 with appropriate urgency. The school is demonstrating a secure capacity for further improvement.

External support

The school makes good use of outside agencies to support its development. Both the LA and the diocese have provided valuable help.

Main Judgements

The school has made good progress towards improving the pupils' behaviour.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure greater consistency in the marking of pupils' work.
- Improve teachers' skills in using ongoing assessments to support the pupils' learning.
- Ensure school improvement initiatives are implemented and monitored more consistently.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for Coventry and the Director of Schools for the Diocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Colin Humphreys
H M Inspector