



21 September 2006

Mr John McAuley
Acting Headteacher
Newman Catholic School
Lismore Place
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA1 1NA

Dear Mr McAuley,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mary Sewell, Ann Wallis and Peter McKay, Additional Inspectors to your school on 19 and 20 September 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2004.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, members of staff, the associate headteacher, and a representative from the local authority. Twenty lessons were seen.

Context

Since the last visit in June 2006, the headteacher has taken long-term sick leave. However the overall staffing picture is now much more stable than it was twelve months ago. The deputy headteacher is now acting headteacher and is receiving support from the headteacher of another school. The assistant headteacher is also receiving mentor support.

Achievement and standards

The focus of the visit was on achievement and standards mainly in Years 11 and 13, and the standards achieved in the Key Stage 3 tests last year.

In the lessons seen, especially in Key Stages 3 and 4, the standards achieved were consistently below the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and the curriculum. This partly reflects the introduction of planned and well-structured strategies designed to raise standards and improve achievement. However the impact of these developments has yet to be seen.

The 2006 Key Stage 3 tests showed an improvement in English, mathematics and science from the 2005 levels. The improvement in mathematics and science enabled the school to meet statutory targets and the target levels for similar schools. Analysis of the school's data indicates that at the end of Key Stage 2 the year group's achievement was average. However only in mathematics was the expected rate of progress to Key Stage 3 levels of attainment achieved; in English and science progress was more limited. Too many students remained stuck at the level they achieved in their Key Stage 2 tests, and a minority regressed from their Key Stage 2 attainment. It is not possible to comment on the value added to pupils' achievement in Key Stage 3 as the data is not yet available.

GCSE results were lower in 2006 than in the previous year, showing a fall of over 10% overall. In particular the proportion of students obtaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics was 27.4%, when the national figure for such grades is 46%. These levels of achievement had been anticipated by the school following the disruptions of the previous year when the school was operating on three sites, with staff being able to work on only one site during a session. The disruption also affected students' completion of coursework. Particularly concerning are the low levels of achievement in history (21.4% A* to C), geography (41.1% A* to C) and mathematics (35% A* to C), although the last two subjects experienced significant staffing disruption during the year. During 2005-6 the school had identified its limited use of data and targets and had begun to address these issues following the appointment of the deputy and assistant headteachers, but the actions taken, whilst appropriate, had not had enough time to raise standards significantly by the time of the examinations.

A-level results in 2006 were below average. These represented a fall of 20% from the previous year. The school is in the bottom 10% of schools nationally in adding value to students' results. Whilst general studies and psychology received above average grades, eight other subjects received the lowest or next to lowest value added scores. The position is complicated by two other factors: some subjects are taught at other schools, and Newman classes contain students from other schools.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- improve standards at the end of Year 9 and GCSE - inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils' attitudes are satisfactory: they behave well in school and the school's increased emphasis on personal appearance and behaviour has raised standards. In some groups, particularly those with lower attaining students, attitudes have been adversely affected by the number of temporary staff who taught them during the last year. Attendance is satisfactory overall: this represents an improvement from the last visit and results from improved monitoring procedures to ensure that registration is more accurately recorded. Students do not always arrive punctually for the start of lessons. Sixth-form attendance is good.

The assembly seen was well planned and organised, with appropriate opportunity for spiritual reflection. However the registration sessions seen did not have such opportunities, nor were any prayers said.

Students interviewed spoke of enjoying more of their lessons as work was increasingly related to their interests and capabilities. Their enthusiasm was particularly evident in technology and art.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was generally good, with none being inadequate. The best lessons are well planned, identify learners' different learning styles and the needs of students with additional learning needs and/or disabilities. They have clear objectives. Lessons showed good pace and involved the students in lively and interesting work, well matched to their capabilities. Good use is made of displays defining technical terms, enabling students to be aware of what they have to do to achieve higher levels of attainment. Besides the good teaching of many longer serving staff, more recent appointments have added to the strength of teaching, leading to an overall improvement. There remain some concerns, particularly to ensure that all staff fully understand and use the school's planning and assessment materials: under the leadership of the assistant headteacher, these issues are being identified and addressed in a well-organised and systematic way. Some lesson objectives require a sharper focus to match the learning to the varying levels of students' attainment rather than to the outcomes of the work set.

Assessment and target setting are being used much more effectively, although they were not consistently used in all of the lessons seen. The

introduction of a school planner for each student potentially supports the use of targets and the rewards system. The planners are being carefully monitored by the senior leadership team on a regular basis. The use of information about the value added to student attainment needs further development. Potentially good systems were put in place during the second part of 2005-6. These now need to be applied rigorously and consistently to ensure that they have the maximum impact on students' achievement. The judgement that progress on this issue remains inadequate does not ignore the work put in on assessment and target setting. However it is too soon to see the impact of the new arrangements in raising standards and achievement.

The school has rightly identified literacy skills as a major area for investigation and improvement. Reading tests have been used at the start of the present term to identify students in need of support and staff in-service training has addressed speaking and listening skills.

A review of the numbers of students identified as having additional learning needs and/or difficulties has led to an increase in the number of the special needs register. Support is being devised for these students.

Four students from Year 10 and Year 11 attend the Carlisle Achievement Zone (CAZ): due to a lack of space and staff the CAZ does not provide ten sessions of education a week. Sessions not at the CAZ are recorded on their attendance record as 'not required to attend' and attendance is only reported to Newman school on a weekly basis. As a consequence, these students do not have their entitlement to full time education. This is the second time HMI has drawn the school's and the local authority's attention to this issue. It is noted that action to address this issue is planned.

Liaison with primary schools has been reviewed in the current year and is being organised on a more clearly planned basis.

The programme for sixth-form students has been reviewed for the present year and the school is seeking to ensure that all receive at least 21 teaching periods a week. This is a significant improvement on the arrangements for previous years.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- improve the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 with better planning, delivery and assessment – satisfactory progress
- assess students' attainment against the standards they have demonstrated previously in order to ensure that they make the necessary progress – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has succeeded in increasing the pace of change in the school; the learning ethos has improved under his leadership and overall morale has been raised. These are significant developments.

The senior leadership team has been changed from the start of the present year, with responsibilities being reorganised and the addition of the head of technology to the team. The changes are welcome and are part of a wider set of moves designed to simplify the organisation of the school. Thus the introduction of a weekly timetable, rather than a fortnightly one, the change to a five-period day, as well as giving responsibility for the line management of all heads of department to the assistant headteacher rather than sharing this across several senior managers, all help to clarify arrangements. The new school improvement plan is a generally clear document, although its overall aim of raising standards permeates several sections rather than being considered separately. This year it has been devised by the whole leadership team; this is a positive development, and the document and its intentions are to be shared with the whole staff well before half term.

The monitoring of teaching is effective and accurate: the rigorous and thorough use of monitoring, led by the assistant headteacher, has enabled the overall quality of teaching to be improved in the last two terms. There remain some subjects where improvements are not yet fully in place.

Effective progress continues to be made on developing citizenship work, linking this with personal, social and health education, whilst identifying it as a specific subject on the timetable.

The statutory requirements for reporting to parents are now met.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- increase the amount and quality of monitoring and evaluation of the school by subject managers, reinforced by senior managers, in order to raise standards – satisfactory progress
- compliance with the statutory requirements for citizenship – good progress
- compliance with the statutory requirements for reporting to parents – good progress

External support

The welcome provision of associate headteacher support for the acting headteacher and the assistant headteacher is being effectively used to help them in areas where they have relatively limited experience. It is also enabling them to focus clearly on identifying priorities and ensuring that all staff have a clearer perception of what needs to be done. The associate

head's support for the headteacher has been established in draft form: it would be useful to have this role more clearly defined, not least since the local authority is providing additional support at his school to release him to work at Newman.

The local authority has continued to provide a wide range of support to the school, although no monitoring visit has been made since the third such visit in March. Another visit is due in October. The school specific monitoring group met regularly up to May 2006, and a further meeting is planned in October. Its oversight of the school's progress has proved useful in the past.

The school improvement officer continues to provide regular support and the significant support provided by secondary leadership support officer towards the end of the summer term and at the start of the present term has been greatly valued by the school. Both provide the school with useful brief notes on their work. There is no corresponding practice for briefly logging meetings and discussions held by staff groups, including those between the acting headteacher and the associate headteacher. The leadership work has had a significant impact upon the school improvement planning process, using the Cumbria guidance pack, linking this to other documentation such as the post Ofsted action plan, and encouraging the school to develop its clear annual management programme. Job descriptions have been written for all staff, with modifications being included to help staff understand their role in school development.

The support provided has enabled the senior leadership team to develop and implement more clearly defined targets and tasks. It has provided the school with a better capacity to improve than was noted at the time of the last visit. This is now satisfactory.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures - satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards throughout the school, and improve achievement in years 9, 11 and 13; and
- ensure that challenging targets are set, based upon prior attainment, and that students' progress towards these is closely monitored and the that the targets are regularly related to their progress in learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Corporate Director of Education for Cumbria and the Diocese of Lancaster.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bradley
H M Inspector