

17 January 2008

Mr P Dickinson  
Archbishop Beck Catholic Sports College  
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Dear Mr Dickinson

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on 16 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the staff and the groups of pupils and sixth form students who gave of their time to meet with me.

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.

As a result of the inspection on 1–2 November 2006, the college was asked to address four areas for improvement: to raise standards, particularly in the weaker performing subjects; to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form, focusing sharply on students' achievement; to increase the amount of good teaching so that pupils enjoy learning more actively and independently; and to review all policies systematically as part of longer term planning to improve the school. There have been many staffing changes since the college was placed in special measures in June 2005 and a further change in headship since the 2006 inspection.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The senior leadership team is providing strong leadership to drive forward the improvement agenda. Rigorous self-evaluation, good professional development and effective performance management ensure that the college continues to grow as a learning organisation for both staff and pupils. Staff have embraced changes enthusiastically and are committed to building on the improvements made over the last two years. They are working effectively with local authority (LA) partners who have provided good support to enable the college to build capacity.

Provision is underpinned by the strong Catholic ethos which nurtures pupils' personal development as well as their academic achievement. Pupils report that behaviour has

improved, bullying is rare and effectively dealt with if it should occur. Support for vulnerable pupils has been enhanced by the appointment of a social inclusion manager. Pupils' increased enjoyment is evident in their improved attendance and punctuality at the start of lessons. Policies and procedures have been brought fully up to date. Safe recruitment and risk assessment procedures meet current government guidelines and are understood by staff.

Sport, and information and communication technology (ICT) specialist status has made a considerable contribution to the progress the college has made. The physical education (PE) and ICT departments are leading on improving teaching and learning, sharing best practice and providing training and support for staff. Funding has been used well to develop stimulating learning opportunities and enhance and enrich the curriculum. Pupils have good opportunities to develop coaching and leadership skills. They are proud of their sporting achievements and the reputation of the college as the hub of the North Liverpool School Sport Partnership.

The college has made good progress in raising pupils' achievement across departments and key stages. Improvements in pupils' GCSE results have been outstanding. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE has increased from 27% in 2005 to 57% in 2007, bringing the college's performance close to the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics has shown rapid improvement from 23% in 2005 to 38% in 2007. The college is the tenth most improved secondary school in the country on this indicator. The positive impact of work to improve progress at Key Stage 3 is evident in the 2007 provisional results. The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 and above in the English tests increased significantly from 64% in 2006 to 88% in 2007. Mathematics and science results also show improvement at 77% and 66% respectively.

The improved standards have been brought about by improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and robust strategies to tackle the variation in standards between different subjects. Rigorous monitoring has enabled leaders to form a clear view of what is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning within each department. Professional development has been well planned to meet the needs of the college and individual teachers. Pupil progress tracking is very well developed and is used as a model of good practice across the LA. Teachers can easily identify pupils who are underachieving in order to plan appropriate intervention and support. The role of teaching assistants has been reviewed and they are being deployed effectively within departments to enhance pupils' learning and achievement.

A few lessons were sampled during the inspection and these verified the college's own evaluation, which indicates that the proportion of good teaching has increased. Lessons are well structured and assessment opportunities, including peer and self-assessment, are used effectively. Pupils are regularly made aware of the level they are working at and know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers set challenging targets and pupils are generally well motivated to achieve highly. In a few lessons, however, pupils have too little opportunity to actively participate in collaborative or independent learning and they can become inattentive. Active

engagement of pupils is identified by the college as an area for further development. Good practice is being effectively shared through teaching and learning coaches, teacher champions and department champions. Pupils were extremely positive about the improvements they have seen in lessons. They cite increased interaction as a feature of the best and most enjoyable lessons. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is also a welcome improvement, including the on-line homework.

A new head of sixth form was appointed in September 2006 and is providing enthusiastic and effective leadership focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising achievement. Improvements are evident in the standards attained in examinations, with AS pass rates increasing from 70% in 2006 to 90% in 2007 and A2 results from 87% to 93%. The school's participation in the Alt Valley collaborative has increased students' access to courses giving them broad and balanced post-16 opportunities. Students are welcoming of these increased opportunities, although some report that transport can be problematic. The student progress tracking and assessment system used across all five schools provides comprehensive information about the progress of individual students. It is used effectively to provide challenge and support where students are underachieving.

The college has established solid structures and procedures to plan good quality teaching and assess pupils' progress. It recognises that there is further work to do to ensure that all lessons actively engage pupils and has set challenging targets to ensure that it remains focused on further improving the quality of its provision.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall  
Her Majesty's Inspector