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15 May 2009

Mr S. Hayes
Headteacher
St John Fisher Catholic High School
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Peterborough
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Dear Mr Hayes

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School

Following my visit with Cheryl Jackson, Michael Miller and Jacqueline Pentlow, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 14 May 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed only following consultation with HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough, and the Diocesan Director of Schools' Service for the Diocese of East Anglia.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St John Fisher Catholic High School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, a group of sixth form students and a group of Year 8 pupils, senior leaders, middle leaders, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the executive headteacher has been appointed to the substantive headship. He took up his permanent post at the start of the summer term. Three teachers have left the school. Six temporary teachers have been made permanent. Two more teachers are due to start in June 2009, and four have been appointed to start in September.

In February the school moved back to its original site into a building some of which is entirely refurbished and some of which is new.

Achievement and standards

In Year 11, while standards remain very low and there is still widespread underachievement, progress has accelerated. The school's tracking data indicates that, since the previous monitoring visit, a significantly increased number of Year 11 pupils are on track to meet their GCSE targets. Intensive one to one tuition in English and mathematics for selected pupils, coupled with increased revision sessions, have been effective in motivating pupils and addressing some of the gaps in their learning. In Year 10, several groups of pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, are making steady progress towards their targets. The significant underachievement which remains in this year group is easily identified by the school's much improved data, and as a result the school has begun to tackle it more systematically. The attainment of Key Stage 3 pupils is now assessed with appropriate regularity by their teachers. However, as yet these assessments are insufficiently moderated so senior leaders cannot be assured of their accuracy. The progress of Key Stage 3 pupils over time, therefore, is not clear. The school has rightly identified the need to use accurate data to begin to set more aspirational targets for all pupils in all subjects and to track their progress towards these on a regular basis.

As at the time of the previous visit, pupils made satisfactory progress in most of the lessons observed, and where teaching was good or better, so was pupils' progress. The school is keenly aware that, in order to remedy some of the longstanding

weaknesses in some pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, more teaching needs consistently to be good.

Standards reached by Year 13 in A-level examinations in 2008 were below average overall and were lower than in the previous year. Progress made by the majority of students was below that which was expected of them. The school's data indicate that standards in the sixth form are now broadly average and that progress is now satisfactory for most students. However, not all departments are maintaining sufficient information from marking and assessment to underpin their judgements on sixth form students' progress.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise students' achievement especially in mathematics and for underachieving groups, including boys, students with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is satisfactory overall and continuing to improve. Behaviour out of lessons and around the site is good. The pupils thoroughly appreciate the new buildings and are treating them with real respect. This was evident during the monitoring inspection in how the pupils' moved around the building and in the lack of litter following break.

The behaviour management systems introduced just before the last visit are being monitored well and show an improving picture. The school has rightly identified that there are inconsistencies in how the policy is used and is supporting those staff who are not using it effectively. There have been no permanent exclusions since the last visit and the number of fixed-term exclusions is continuing to fall, as is the frequency of use of the seclusion room and the on-call system. The bullying and racism logs show that incidents are rare, and pupils' and students' views corroborate this.

The appointment of Student Support Officers, each of whom works with a specific year group, is providing a good supportive structure for pupils. These members of staff previously had other posts in the school so they know the pupils well, and they work well as a team. They are providing very good pastoral care. They are always prepared to solve problems for the pupils, enabling them to access a more suitable curriculum and learning experience and this is beginning to have an impact on some pupils' achievement. The school recognises that there are aspects of their role which are still to be developed.

Pupils' attendance is continuing to improve and persistent non-attendance is falling. The school is aware that there is too much variation between the attendance of different year groups and is ensuring that the importance of attendance is continually emphasised.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching was similar to that observed at the previous monitoring inspection. However, aspects of teaching and learning have improved. Lesson plans are reasonably thorough, lessons generally start promptly, and pupils arrive ready to learn. Almost all lessons include a satisfactory range of teaching strategies and activities.

There is a clear contrast between the teaching which is good and that which is satisfactory. The good lessons include significantly more opportunities for pupils to think, to reason, to discuss, to work independently, and to extend their learning. In these lessons the teachers employ a variety of suitable strategies to support learners of English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties. Pupils' enjoyment of their learning is evident. Where lessons are satisfactory, and particularly where they are barely satisfactory, the teacher tends to dominate the lesson, the tasks are not as demanding and there are fewer opportunities for pupils to work at their own pace, be independent, and reach higher levels. In these lessons, although teachers are aware of pupils' individual needs they do not use a wide or imaginative enough range of strategies to help each learner to be successful. There is still an over-reliance of the use of worksheets. In the weaker lessons, although pupils' behaviour is satisfactory they are passive and then become bored, which occasionally leads to low level disruption.

A small amount of inadequate teaching remains. Support has been provided where necessary, both by the school and the local authority, and the school's records show some improvement. Senior leaders understand the need to provide a high level of support and challenge in order to eradicate inadequate teaching as a matter of urgency.

The school has written an appropriate new marking policy, aspects of which have begun to be implemented. Departments have been asked to draft their own departmental policies in response. However, both the school's own evaluations and evidence from inspection indicate that marking remains inadequate. There are inconsistencies within and across departments, and overall, too much marking is patchy, infrequent, and of poor quality.

There is some emerging good practice in the use of assessment in some classes, although this is not yet widespread. In mathematics for example, a teacher had analysed the pupils' latest test results and was spending the last part of each lesson during the week focusing on an aspect which many pupils had found difficult. In a good French lesson, the teacher helped pupils to review their learning very effectively, referred to national curriculum levels and challenged them to reflect on how they could improve. In Classics, assessment is consistently used well – teachers ask open questions which allow pupils to explain their reasoning, marking is thorough, and pupils know what they need to do to improve.

Form time is of variable quality. In the most constructive sessions, pupils worked with their form tutor on a specific topic. Other sessions were too unstructured and time was not used well.

The school has made significant strides in identifying the pupils' additional specific needs. Pupils who have learning difficulties, including those who have a statement of special educational need, and those who have English as an additional language, now have their needs well identified. However, senior leaders are well aware that some teachers are still not using this information to best effect in order to provide the appropriate support for these pupils in the mainstream classroom. The school is in the process of carefully examining different ways of presenting this information to highlight for teachers what individual pupils' learning needs are and what strategies could best be used to help them to learn effectively. Pupils have not yet been made sufficiently aware of how they can improve their own learning.

There has been a significant amount of additional support put in place for pupils in recent months. Pupils are enjoying these opportunities, but there is a need to examine carefully the quality of this support and to ensure that each pupil's learning experience is appropriate and balanced. Younger students who receive literacy support from appropriately trained sixth formers during registration time are noticeably growing in confidence and are already acquiring increased independent learning skills.

Inclusion is central to the work of the school. The weekly 'inclusion forum' is growing in strength and is making a significant impact by improving communication and sharing of information within the school as well as further strengthening the links with the wide range of supportive outside agencies. This group enables Student Support Officers and teaching assistants to intervene and draw up action plans for pupils who are causing concern. Teaching assistants, who are now receiving additional and appropriate training, make a positive contribution in lessons.

The school has carried out a thorough review of the quality of provision in the sixth form and has accurately identified the key areas for improvement. Many appropriate developments have begun or are planned but are too new to have had an impact. Because of gaps in leadership, the monitoring of the sixth form slipped during the last year. However, temporary leaders have done a satisfactory job in maintaining the smooth running on a day to day basis. The school's new senior leaders have taken the time to consider thoughtfully what qualities are required from a new Head of Sixth Form. Consequently, a new appointment has been made from the start of June and, appropriately, this is to be combined with the post of 14-19 coordinator to ensure greater continuity of pathways and opportunities for students.

As in the rest of the school, the marking of students' work is too inconsistent. There is good practice where marking is aligned well to examination board requirements

and teachers' comments are formative, pointing students to the next steps they need to take in order to consolidate, then improve their grades. However, whilst in the best practice teachers keep detailed records of their marking, and relate these to potential grades, others maintain practically no records at all. Consequently, these teachers have difficulty in assessing the true rate of their students' progress.

Students' personal development in the sixth form is good overall. Students are very positive about the improvements the school has made overall during the current academic year. Furthermore, students respect each other, and in discussion with inspectors emphasised that they perceive that racial and religious harmony and understanding in the sixth form and in the school are good.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Co-ordinate more effectively any additional support for students, especially those with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language so that the curriculum meets their needs – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least satisfactory or better – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The appointment of the executive headteacher to the substantive post has created much needed stability for the school. His leadership continues to be perceptive, determined and very well focused on improvement. He has worked tirelessly and effectively to implement a new staffing structure, to appoint new staff, and to develop the capacity of the senior leadership team.

As a result of the high level of organisation and planning by the senior leaders, the move to the new building went very smoothly, and disruption to learning was minimal. The headteacher, senior leaders and staff have successfully conveyed to pupils the need to respect their new school, and as a result the buildings and the grounds have been kept immaculate.

Senior leaders' line management role has developed satisfactorily. Meetings with middle leaders are more systematic and are recorded in a way which gives clarity to the actions needed and allows senior leaders to follow these up as required. Middle leaders appreciate the increased consistency.

Rightly, a proportion of the responsibility for improving teaching and learning and thereby raising standards has been devolved to middle leaders. In some areas, this is beginning to work successfully and there is evidence of improvement. What is expected of the middle leaders in terms of monitoring and evaluation has been made clearer. However, there is variability in practice and the outcomes are therefore too inconsistent. Not all middle leaders are yet proficient in evaluating the performance

data available to them, or in using this data to prevent underachievement and to compare their department's performance to national benchmarks.

Both middle and senior leaders observe lessons. Some of these lesson observations include useful points for improvement for individual teachers, but too many focus on the teacher's actions rather than on the pupils' learning. Moreover, the outcomes of these observations are not brought together and analysed by a senior leader to find common strengths and issues across the school and therefore to drive improvement. Consequently, there is still insufficient good teaching, and too much remains which is barely satisfactory.

The well led interim executive board continues to take a thorough approach to its role. Members are rigorous in holding the school's leaders to account, while providing encouragement and support. The rota of attendance by middle leaders is effective in keeping the interim executive board informed about subject-specific issues and developing the roles of these leaders. Sensibly, three associate members have been appointed to begin to form a shadow governing body.

Overall, the appointment of the substantive headteacher, the more stable staffing and the more effective senior leadership, combined with the much improved data, and the greatly improved resources provided by the new building, have laid secure foundations for the school's further improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously analyse the effectiveness of actions taken to improve students' learning and progress – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's support for the school has been good. Because the support has been well focused on the school's priorities, and has been well co-ordinated, it has been effective in promoting improvement. Crucially, the two secondments into the senior leadership team have been extended for another year.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use information from monitoring and evaluation activities to differentiate the support and challenge for each teacher according to need, and ensure that the best practitioners are given the opportunity to share practice with colleagues.
- Ensure that lesson planning and teaching, including in form time, focus on the desired learning outcomes for each pupil and that lessons develop pupils' independent learning skills.
- Develop the accuracy of teachers' assessment and ensure that this is used by them to plan the next steps in pupils' learning.

