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Mr S. Hayes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hayes

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

Following my visit with Godfrey Bancroft, Lynn Lowery and Thelma McIntosh-Clark, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7 and 8 October 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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' Services 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the senior leaders seconded from the local authority, middle leaders, a group of sixth form students, Interim Executive Board (IEB) members and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school now has substantive staff in all teaching and support posts. The restructure of support staffing is complete and several new teaching assistant posts have been created. The school's roll has increased: Years 7 to 10 are now full and have waiting lists. The sixth form is the largest it has been for several years. The two seconded posts from the LA to the senior leadership team have been extended to the end of this academic year.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Provisional data indicates that the school's GCSE results in the summer of 2009, while still low in comparison with provisional national averages, were considerably better than the school's 2008 results. Forty eight percent of pupils gained 5 A*-C grades in 2009, rising 14 percentage points from 2008 and exceeding the school's targets. The percentage of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades including English and mathematics rose by 13 percentage points to 31%, meeting the school's target. All other indicators also showed improvements. Although English results remain stronger than those in mathematics, mathematics results nevertheless showed notable improvement. Too many pupils did not make the expected progress over the course of Key Stage 4 in English, mathematics or science. However, overall these much improved GCSE results indicate the effectiveness of the strategies which the school put in place over the last academic year with this year group to accelerate their progress and to address the gaps in their previous learning.

Results at A2 Level were below the school's targets overall, though this masks considerable variation: some students achieved very well while others' results were much lower than expected. Some students were not guided well enough on entry to the sixth form to select suitable courses, which was a factor in the weaker outcomes. AS Level results were stronger, with students generally reaching or exceeding their target grades, showing the impact of some of the improved provision.

Attainment by the end of Year 9 remains low in comparison with national averages and test results in the summer of 2009 did not meet the school's targets. This reflects the disruption this year group had suffered to their learning, including inadequate time spent on core subjects over the key stage and significant gaps in staffing.

Senior leaders have undertaken extensive analysis of all results from summer 2009, including those from Year 9. Importantly, this has been used to set suitable targets for pupils and to identify the support they need to reach them. The extensive data which senior leaders and staff hold on each year group enables them to identify quickly where underachievement remains and to tackle it systematically. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that teachers' assessments are thoroughly moderated.

Pupils made satisfactory progress overall in the lessons observed during the inspection. Some teachers are making a concerted effort to develop pupils' learning skills, such as their ability to work in groups, to discuss, to research and to motivate themselves. In lessons where these techniques were used this had a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Progress since the last visit on the area 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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour was satisfactory, both in lessons and around the school. In the most effective lessons observed, behaviour was good or outstanding, but when lessons were not planned so that pupils were fully engaged in learning, some became inattentive. Pupils are considerate of one another, and are friendly and courteous to adults and visitors. They appreciate greatly the facilities of the new premises and continue to treat them with respect. Most pupils move around the site in an orderly fashion, but occasionally, particularly in congested areas, there are instances of boisterous behaviour.

The behaviour management systems are implemented largely satisfactorily, but not always consistently. Fixed-term exclusions continue to fall. There has been one permanent exclusion this term. Monitoring of the use of the seclusion room shows that no pupil has spent more than one session in this base. The on-call system continues to enable senior leaders to provide swift support for teachers as required. No bullying or racist incidents have been reported this term.

Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with national averages, but there remains too much variation between and within year groups. The number of persistent non-

attenders has fallen significantly. The school regularly emphasises to pupils and parents the importance of regular attendance. Student support officers continue to provide effective pastoral care for pupils, and the police community officer is increasingly effective in supporting the development of positive attitudes within the school and the community.

During an excellent assembly which celebrated pupils' achievements, spirituality featured strongly through the use of music and topical explanations that appealed to pupils' interests. The time for prayer was observed by all.

The school is placing an increasing emphasis on enabling pupils to take responsibility. Sixth form prefects have just been appointed and training is about to take place. Twice a week during form time a large group of Year 11 and sixth form 'buddies' read on a one-to-one basis with a younger pupil. This is a well organised and well managed scheme, to which both younger and older pupils are responding very well.

The effectiveness of provision

More good teaching was seen during this visit than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, and two outstanding lessons were observed. Good teaching was seen in a range of subjects. Overall, however, there is still too much inconsistency in the way in the school's expectations are met in the planning and teaching of lessons. This relates particularly to the way in which the use of assessment and other relevant information is used to plan lessons to meet the needs of the range of learners, the use of group and paired work to promote independent learning, and the frequency and usefulness of marking. Consequently, the clear contrast between lessons where there is good teaching and those where teaching is satisfactory remains as reported in the previous monitoring letter.

As before, the lessons where teaching and learning were good or outstanding included significantly more opportunities for pupils to think, to reason, to discuss, to work independently, and to extend their learning. In these lessons the teachers employed a range of suitable strategies to support learners of English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties. Pupils' enjoyment of their learning was evident. When present, support staff were an integral part of the lesson and worked consistently well to build pupils' confidence and extend their understanding. In these lessons, both literacy and oracy skills were developed well. In the best lessons assessment was used very skilfully to shape each step in the pupils' learning and to empower pupils to take some responsibility for their own progress.

In lessons where teaching was satisfactory, and particularly where it was barely satisfactory, the teacher tended to dominate the lesson or the tasks were not as demanding and there were fewer opportunities for pupils to work at their own pace, be independent, and reach higher levels. In these lessons, although teachers were

generally aware of pupils' individual needs they did not use a wide or imaginative enough range of strategies to help each learner to be successful. Support staff tended to be less of an integral part of the lesson. There is still some over-reliance of the use of worksheets. Some of the less experienced teachers are rightly trying to build in group and paired work to their lessons, but because pupils do not encounter these experiences often enough in their other lessons they do not always understand the teachers' expectations.

Isolated pockets of inadequate teaching remain. As reported previously, in the weaker lessons, although pupils' behaviour is generally satisfactory they are passive and then become bored, which occasionally leads to low level disruption. Despite a clear and suitable policy, marking remains generally weak.

Provision for students in the sixth form is improving steadily. While the measures introduced are too new to have yet had an impact on standards there is evidence to show that students are already making better progress. This is a result of the new dynamic leadership, the establishment of a secure baseline for improvement, and the clear vision for the future direction of the sixth form. Arrangements to ensure that students are well informed about their progress are much clearer. They also have a better understanding of their target grades and of how to improve their work. This is because the quality of teachers' marking of sixth formers' work is now much better, a feature which the students appreciate. Students are also pleased with the improved tutorial system that provides them with stronger support. One to one meetings between students and teachers are now a regular feature and help to keep students focussed and on track. The range of A Level and vocational courses continues to expand, as does the additional activities which give opportunities for students to take responsibility and to contribute to the community within and beyond the school. Sixth form students comment that they feel well prepared for the next stages of their education.

The school now has effective strategies for identifying individual pupils' additional learning needs and clear and helpful advice is provided to teachers on how they can best support individual pupils in lessons. For learners of English as an additional language, more accurate levelling of each pupil's stage of language acquisition is now in place which is helping to ensure effective support from teaching assistants where appropriate. This detailed information has been shared with subject teachers. While some use it well to adapt their lessons to meet individual pupils' needs this is still too inconsistent.

The school has, once again, expanded its additional provision to meet pupils' differing needs. Importantly, a 'nurture group' has been introduced to help vulnerable Year 7 pupils through the transition into secondary school. Staff have been trained appropriately and links with primary schools have been strengthened so these pupils are identified early in Year 6. Similarly, 'sensory circuit training' is provided to meet the particular needs of some pupils. Literacy support has been extended to include all Year 7 pupils whose reading age is lower than their actual

age and sixth form and Year 11 reading buddies are providing them with effective support. Additional teaching assistants have been appointed and the school is now able to offer a more tailored and effective range of support to those pupils whose first language is not English.

The school monitors closely the attendance of the Key Stage 4 pupils who undertake vocational courses at local colleges. There is regular communication about their progress and support from student support officers is provided where there are concerns. As a result, all of them passed their courses in 2009. However, provision in school for some of these Year 10 pupils is less secure. They sometimes miss important lessons due to their off-site courses and the value and relevance of the learning support programme provided for them in school requires clarification.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher is providing the school with a clear and aspirational direction and the impact of this is evident in the range of improvements made since the previous monitoring visit.

Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of most aspects of the school's work is much improved and significantly more systematic. A sensible programme of monitoring activities enables staff to know the focus of each, and is allowing senior leaders to gain a more comprehensive picture of the quality of provision in the school. Several senior leaders are making good use of this information to drive and shape improvement. In particular, the leaders of teaching and learning and of assessment, alongside the headteacher, have used their knowledge of the school's developing strengths and remaining weaknesses to introduce a range of initiatives which are carefully designed to raise standards in all year groups. For example, good use has been made of the thorough range of assessment data to ensure that an appropriate group of pupils are included in the new Assertive Mentoring programme, and that the Academic Tutoring programme in which all pupils take part is tailored according to pupils' needs. While these initiatives are new and therefore have had limited impact, their intentions are clear and appropriate. The leaders of this programmes are well organised and have a good understanding of the purpose of each, which they are conveying clearly to staff. The final part of the assessment system, which involves clearer communication with pupils about their targets and a system to enable them to track their own progress, is sound and about to be implemented.

The deputy headteacher in charge of teaching and learning has organised a range of appropriate monitoring and evaluation activities in the first month of the term. Importantly, he understands the need to bring together the findings of all of these, together with assessment information, in order to gain a full and accurate picture of the current quality of teaching. The introduction of a standard template for lesson plans is assisting the monitoring of planning. Crucially, an effective individualised programme of support is in place to meet teachers' differing needs. The newly planned citizenship and PSHE curricula which have been introduced this term are thorough and well thought out and senior leaders are aware of the need to monitor the effectiveness of their implementation. The systems to support the management of behaviour continue to be effective although not always used consistently by staff.

A few areas remain in which monitoring is not used sufficiently consistently to bring about improvement, for example in analysing the reasons for sporadic attendance and analysing the on-call system in order to support and challenge staff and pupils. There is no clear overview of the quality of provision and the curriculum balance for those pupils in Key Stage 4 who are not taking the full range of GCSEs and those who receive some of their teaching off-site.

The Interim Executive Board continues to be rigorous in challenging and supporting the school to improve. The shadow governing body has been formed and has just met for the first time. Plans to expand its role over time are appropriate.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

External support

The LA's support for the school continues to be good. The support is well focused on the school's priorities, and it has been effective in promoting improvement. The extension of the two secondments is valuable.

Priorities for further improvement

- Redefine the essential elements of each lesson and ensure that they are consistently included by all staff in all subjects.
- Develop the use of paired and group work to assist pupils' learning.
- Re-assess the curriculum balance and content for the Key Stage 4 pupils who are not taking the full range of GCSEs and those who receive some of their teaching off-site.