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Mrs M McAuley
Acting Headteacher
St Patrick's Catholic College
Baysdale Road
Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 9DE

Dear Mrs McAuley

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Patrick's Catholic College

Following my visit with Peter Bannon, additional inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 June 2010, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the agreement of the lead inspector.

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 Special School Improvement Committee, the Director of Children's Services for Stockton-on-Tees, and the Commissioner for Schools for the Diocese of Middlesbrough.

Yours sincerely

Joan McKenna
Additional inspector



Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Patrick's Catholic College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and the executive headteacher, both of whom are from the Outwood Grange Family of Schools, the chief executive of the Outwood Grange Family of Schools, the chair of the special school improvement committee who is also the local authority's chief adviser, two members of the committee, one of whom is a representative from the Diocese of Middlesbrough, and a group of students.

Context

Since the inspection, the headteacher has left and another senior leader is absent. The local authority has contracted a National Leader in Education (NLE) from the Outwood Grange Academy to run the school. The NLE has appointed an acting headteacher who works full time in the school, and several other staff from the Outwood Grange Family contribute to developing and supporting the school, including an executive headteacher who works at the school for one day each week. Seven teachers are absent and are being covered by a range of supply teachers or others, mostly working in a temporary capacity. The school is a member of the Pope Benedict XVI Federation of schools. The full governing body of the federation has delegated powers of governance for St Patrick's to a special school improvement committee.

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

A thorough and comprehensive system for assessing students' attainment and tracking their progress towards targets has been introduced, known as 'Praising Stars'. This will involve students' progress being checked in all subjects, all year groups and by a range of criteria six times per year. To date, one complete cycle of checks has been completed. Those Year 11 students falling most behind, especially in English and mathematics, have been identified and some action has been taken to help them get back on track. Current data are showing that higher standards are predicted in some of the 2010 examination results when compared with last year, providing some very early signs that action has had some positive impact. However, the data also reveal that much remains to be done to ensure that all groups of students across the age range make at least satisfactory progress in all subjects. The new tracking system is designed to impact across other areas too. For example, there is an expectation that teachers and leaders at all levels become more skilled in analysing the data provided by each cycle of assessments in order to take informed and timely action to reduce gaps in achievement. The data will also be used to hold all staff to greater account for the impact they are having on outcomes for students.



Action to improve the quality of teaching has also been prioritised. A programme of training for all staff to update their professional knowledge and skills is underway. A common lesson planning format has been introduced which requires teachers to take into account a range of important and relevant features when preparing lessons. There is much more monitoring of the quality of teaching than previously, with feedback given to individuals and senior leaders using the information to refine actions being taken. Targeted action is being taken to tackle specific weaknesses, with more planned. While all of this work is positive and there are some early signs of impact, more action is necessary to make certain that the quality of teaching is strong enough to ensure that students are making at least satisfactory progress and their earlier underperformance is being compensated for.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that all students, regardless of their academic ability, make at least satisfactory progress by improving teaching and use of assessment information – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The introduction of a new system for managing behaviour, known as 'Consequences', is having a positive impact, with students, teachers and leaders all reporting improvements. In most lessons students do as they are asked and their conduct does not disrupt learning. However, often, students' attitudes in lessons are yet to make a significant contribution to their learning. They have not had the skills of independence, initiative and involvement developed strongly enough and so they are too passive in their approach to their work. Even though they are now beginning to be provided with more opportunities to become actively involved in lessons, some are reluctant to participate and do not demonstrate high enough expectations or aspirations for themselves. This is most evident with the oldest students, not all of whom engage readily or enthusiastically with their work. This is exacerbated in some lessons by the teaching not equipping them to do so or not being stimulating enough to encourage it. Attendance is still a positive feature as it was at the previous inspection, and it does not constitute a barrier to progress.

The effectiveness of provision

There are some signs that action to improve teaching is beginning to make a difference. All teachers now use the prescribed format to plan their lessons, and, although it is completed with varying degrees of detail, this is starting to promote awareness of the factors that need to be taken into account. All teachers are now planning explicit learning outcomes for each lesson, although they are not of consistent quality. Some are lists of what students will do as opposed to what they are expected to learn. Teachers are showing more awareness of the range of abilities and needs of students in their classes. Some teachers are beginning to plan work that is more closely matched to the different needs, or are making it clear to



students what they need to do to reach different National Curriculum levels or examination grades. Overall, however, this remains a weakness. In many lessons, all students are still given identical work, even when, for example, teachers have noted on their plans that students' targets range from A* to E, or across three different National Curriculum levels. The improved assessment information is not yet being used to ensure that this aspect of planning or implementation is precise enough. Following the introduction of a new marking policy, there are signs of more detailed feedback and guidance starting to be given to students, but this is a weak feature. There is still too much inadequate teaching or teaching that is only satisfactory, and too little that is good enough to be promoting fast rates of progress. The right actions are being taken to tackle this, however.

The Outwood Grange leaders are aware that the current curriculum has deficiencies. They have clear and well conceived plans to improve provision in September to make it more fit for purpose. In the meantime, audits of practice in relation to promoting literacy and use of information and communication technology (ICT) have been undertaken to identify what needs to improve. Some action has been taken to bring about improvement, but it is at very early stages. The lesson planning format requires teachers to identify how they will promote these aspects, but this is not a prominent feature and is often completed with a tick rather than in any detail. There are some lessons that focus on promoting literacy in Years 7 and 8. Students in Year 7 who require additional support have been identified and this is due to start soon, with more planned in both Years 7 and 8 for next year. A National Leader in Education from the Outwood Grange Family is working with the English subject leader on planning developments in literacy. A new appointment has just been made for September for someone who is experienced in this area to lead development. Because there has been an appropriate course in place for ICT, all students left school last year having gained a Level 2 qualification. While this shows a satisfactory basic level of ICT competency, not all students achieved as well as they should have done. It is planned that for next year all students will complete a GCSE in ICT by the end of Year 9. The use of ICT across the curriculum remains very variable. The planned introduction of more vocational courses into the curriculum for September will necessitate improved opportunities for students to develop and apply skills in ICT across a range of subjects.

Work to improve provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has started from an extremely low base. An audit of current practice has been undertaken and plans for improvement drawn up as a result, again involving a NLE from the Outwood Grange Family. Training has been provided for staff on addressing the needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers now identify students with special educational needs and/or disabilities on their lessons plans, and in some cases, but not all, strategies for supporting them. There has been some change to the way teaching assistants are deployed and closer links with promoting literacy established. The leadership and staffing structure of

special educational needs is in a state of transition, but is in the process of being strengthened.

Progress in improving literacy, ICT and special educational needs and/or disabilities provision has been slower than in other areas, in part because of staffing issues but also because the other areas have been appropriately prioritised. There is an awareness of the need to escalate the rate of progress in these areas if it is to be judged as satisfactory at the next visit.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Provide opportunities through the curriculum for students to develop their literacy and ICT skills – satisfactory
- Ensure that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities thrive in their learning and make at least satisfactory progress by developing support and providing additional resources – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The involvement of the Outwood Grange Academy and Family of Schools staff has considerably strengthened the senior leadership and management of St Patrick's. The school is benefiting from the contribution of leaders with experience of running successful schools and improving underperforming ones. The new leaders are quickly acquiring an informed view of the factors affecting current effectiveness and are taking concerted action to tackle the weaknesses. Wide-ranging, detailed and appropriately prioritised plans have been drawn up outlining actions to be taken, and they have started to be implemented to positive effect on a range of fronts. These include, for example, the introduction of 'Praising Stars' and 'Consequences' systems and other changes are scheduled for implementation in September. Professional development for staff has improved. Some is aimed at all staff, such as in sessions held after school each Monday. Some is bespoke, targeted on specific needs. The links available through the Outwood Grange Family have been utilised positively to help improve staff's recognition of good practice and understanding of how to promote it within St Patrick's. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation have improved, especially of teaching and its impact on students' learning. From virtually no observations of lessons taking place, there is now an extensive programme of observations, some formal and more that are less formally conducted. Work is underway to involve all leaders in this process and to ensure they have the skills to make accurate judgements and give precise feedback to others. There is a much clearer emphasis on the importance of ensuring accountability of staff at all levels, with the focus on students' outcomes, with plans for developing this further. Line management of middle leaders is more systematic, and, although it is at very early stages, the improved data about pupils' progress are sharpening this process. Some staffing issues are slowing the pace of progress, but these are being tackled. New



appointments have been made for September with the aim of strengthening leadership.

The actions outlined above are positive and there has been considerable development of structures, processes and people in a short space of time. However, the challenge now is to ensure that new arrangements are implemented equally effectively at all levels so that they have the necessary impact on improving the school. Leadership at all levels has been very underdeveloped. While this is now being actively tackled, there is a long way to go to ensure effectiveness and consistency at both senior and middle levels, and to ensure that classroom practice is good enough. Work has been taken to promote staffs' understanding of the school's current position and the part they have to play in improving it. There is a wider realisation of the need for change and the urgency with which it needs to happen on the part of many staff, although not yet all. Despite the acceptance of most staff of the changes underway, and the keenness of some, there is considerable work to do to ensure all have the commitment, knowledge, understanding and skills to make a full contribution.

Those now responsible for governance through the special school improvement committee have brought greater knowledge, understanding and expertise to the role. They are better placed to ask the questions, make decisions and provide the support necessary to help the school improve and check that it is doing so.

The impact of the school's specialist status is mixed, and not yet strong enough. While achievement in mathematics was broadly satisfactory in 2009, and results are predicted to be higher in 2010, the subject is not yet playing a part in driving up whole-school standards. Similarly, while all students attained accreditation in ICT, there are weaknesses in aspects of its provision. The specialism is not yet making a significant contribution beyond the school.

The school's arrangements for checking the suitability of adults working with children meet requirements.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the effectiveness of the leadership and management at all levels, including the governing body, by improving school improvement planning and related action, establishing effective procedures for monitoring and evaluation and improving governance – good

External support

The local authority's statement of action has been evaluated and deemed to meet requirements. It is being implemented well. The local authority is working in close and constructive partnership with the diocese, and both have been instrumental in



acquiring the services of the Outwood Grange staff who are playing the main role in improving the school. Both the local authority and diocese are providing the personnel that have strengthened governance. Other specialist input is being provided. There is acknowledgment that the School Improvement Partner reports need to be more rigorous than previous ones have been.

There is a clear recognition that as the arrangements for both the senior leadership of the school and its governance are temporary, more permanent arrangements will need to be established in the longer term if internal capacity for sustained improvement is to be demonstrated. Furthermore, some of the key external personnel currently involved in governance are about to change and so there is a need to ensure continuity of approach and effectiveness.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for the school remain those identified at the last inspection.